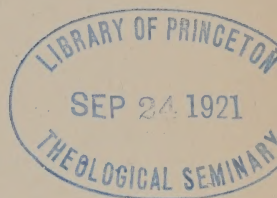


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SERMONS BY THE REV.
JOSEPH ✓ PARKER, D.D.

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These sermons have been printed from the reporter's notes. Probably not a sentence was written beforehand. This will account for irregularity and roughness, and apparent want of punctuation, in the style. Those who heard the discourses will be able to read them according to the preacher's intention.

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[*Sunday Morning, February 26th, 1899.*]

Prayer.

WHEN I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that Thou visitest him? The heavens are telling the glory of God; their speech is poured out like water from an infinite fountain: behold, all Thy works praise Thee, and Thy saints shout aloud for joy. There is nothing which Thou hast not made; we ourselves are the work of Thine hands and the sheep of Thy pasture and the loved of Thine heart; Thou waterest the hills, Thou makest the valleys laugh with corn, Thou dost give food to man and beast. All the water is Thine, and all the fire, and all the shaping power, and all the intention of destiny; the Lord reigneth; we hail Thee as maker of heaven and of earth, and we bless Thee that Thou didst rest from Thy labours because Thou didst complete them in beauty and in suggestion. Thou wilt not forsake the work of Thine own hands, Thou didst make us and not we ourselves, and therefore Thou wilt not leave us nor forsake us, Thou wilt see Thy work through again to its completion and to Thine own satisfaction; Jesus shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied; He Who said, It is finished, shall one day say, It is enough, and His gladness shall overflow. We come to Thee because we love Thee and need Thee and are sure that Thou art nearer to us than we ever can be to ourselves. If men ask us how we know it, we cannot tell, but we know it nevertheless; our hearts burn within us when we hear Thy Gospel and feel the nearness of Thy presence. We bless Thee that we can answer the Divine idea, we thank Thee for our necessity, which is itself a dumb prayer, we thank Thee for many a pain which comes of seeking God in the great darkness, and for the disappointment which leads us to further quest. Thou dost train us according to Thine own way and Thine own will, now in darkness, now in light, now the mountain is the great object-lesson, and now the little child, and now the unseen spirit; but Thy purpose throughout is one of love, and Thou art continually widening and expanding and brightening the vision, until we even under these grey skies begin to discern the outline of heaven. We thank Thee for the religious instinct and for the spiritual sentiment, that strange mysterious hunger within us that longs for bread the fields cannot grow and for wine that is not in the vineyard: as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, the living God.

Only life can satisfy life ; only eternity can fill up and explain time. We bless Thee for Thine House, for Thy day, for every tender memorial of Thyself, for every hint of the wider spaces and every assurance that the best things are always to come. We bring our sins that they may be forgiven ; forget them, we beseech Thee, as Thou dost look upon us through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ; by the power of His blood do Thou wipe out the record of our shame ; tell us that where sin abounds grace doth much more abound, and that nothing can equal the fulness of the Divine grace. If any man here has forsworn his vow and proved faithless to his wedding oath when he accepted Christ and Christ accepted him, let the Lord be pitiful to him, for the devil has for a moment triumphed over his failing strength ; cast him not off, for the soul is not yet utterly dead. If any man is trying to do good, help him in the strenuous task ; if any soul is engaged on the side of right and truth and beauty and purity and the music of the soul, and the fight is going hard against Thy servant, the Lord send some strong angel to his aid who shall smite the foe and bring the battle to victory. If any soul here is distraught in darkness, severely strained, conscious of poverty and bereavement, and distress, and ineffable loss, O Thou who dost keep the wealth of the universe do Thou meet such poverty, and grant unto such agony the healing of the heavenly balm. If any man is content with the world which is always under his feet, if any man seeks his heaven in the grave, if any man is sufficed with the things that can be seen, the Lord pity him, the Lord open his eyes that he may see the vision and the prophecy, and the apocalypse, and the infinite meaning of things. We bring all our sick ones and lay them at Thy feet, Thou healing Jesus ; look at them, and Thy look shall be a blessing, Thy smile shall be a Sabbath morning. And we bring all our broken hearts and shattered lives, and dead ambitions, and trusts that have mocked us, and we ask for their sanctification lest we suffer the final loss. And we pray for our loved ones everywhere—on the sea, and in the far-off land, and in the forest, and in the great city ; for our children, whose hearts are with us though their faces are absent ; and we commend them all to the love which is as the impartial sunshine and the all-embracing sky. The Lord help us to live our few remaining days, and to live them bravely, simply, heroically, and religiously, filling up every day with a prayer and concluding every day with a psalm. Let the Lord pity our littleness, our infirmity, our weakness, and all about us that deserves the pity of the heavens, and bring us all to the Cross, and interpret to us the writing that is above the writing of Pilate. Amen.

THE CREATOR EXPLAINED BY THE CREATION.

"God ended His work which He had made."—GEN ii. 2.



GIVEN the creation, to find the Creator, at least to conjecture about Him. It would be an ennobling exercise for the mind, whatever may come of it. Great questions bring their own profitableness, and there is a reward in all labour, and often the reward is in the labour rather than the result of it. A most interesting problem, therefore, it must be: Given the creation, to explain the Creator; given the work, to find out what the worker must have been. That will be a religious exercise; you would not be in church if you were ashamed of religious exercises; the are always stimulating, elevating, often comforting and inspiring. "God ended His work": did He sign it? Did He so work that no other worker can compare with Him in energy, in efficiency, in utility, and in all the mystery and graciousness of adaptation? It may be worth while to ask these questions; they will have upon the mind the effect that cleansing water has upon the body. Bathe your souls in great inquiries.

This is an eminently reasonable problem. Some men are fond of reason, especially the men who cannot define it or who can only partially define it and who omit from it all that makes it the higher reason and the almost other quantity. Shall we personalise a house and make the building talk to us; shall we subject the edifice to a kind of catechism? There can be no doubt that before our imagination at this moment there is a house, a large house, an important-looking house, and I want so to personalise the house as to elicit from it some information regarding itself. Let us see how the colloquy can proceed. Who planned you? "Nobody." Who built you? "Nobody." Who owns you? "Nobody." Who is re-

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sponsible for the repair of the dilapidation into which you must fall? "Nobody." I cannot believe it; I would not be discourteous to the house, but I feel in my soul that it is talking nonsense. Nobody planned it, built it, owns it, takes care of it, occupies it, renews it. There may be such a house, but I have never heard of it, and it would take strong evidence on the part of the witness who testified to the existence of such a house to enable me to accept his testimony as valid and reliable. Yet this is what I am asked to do in some directions about the house that contains all other houses, the heavens and the earth. Who made you? "Nobody." Who planned you? "Nobody." Who keeps you going? "Nobody, no one." What, no spirit? "None." No soul? "None." I have heard of the mystery of faith, but on my soul there is a denser mystery in unbelief than there is in faith. Given the house, to discover something about the builder of it, or the owner or the occupant. It is a large house; very well, then the man behind it, who made it, or is responsible for it, must be a man of some substance and property. It is an artistically furnished house; every piece of furniture has been set down by the hands of love just in the right place and in the right light and in the right relation to every other piece: then the man who made all this arrangement must, of necessity, have the mind, the instinct, or the training of an artist. Is that good reasoning? Certainly; that is the only reasoning we wish you to apply to the great house with all its furniture and pictures, with all its light and beauty and music. On my soul, but the furnisher of this house called Creation must be of an artistic turn of mind; I, presumably, do not know him and cannot mention his name, and have never seen him, and have never heard of him, but he could not have made this house and be a fool, or weak, or incompetent, or wanting in majesty. Is that good reasoning? I think so; it goes upon human lines, it consults and satisfies the genius of history and of experience. No house ever made itself, therefore I think the heavens and the earth cannot have made themselves; no candle ever lighted its own wick, therefore I should be surprised if the stars were their own lamplighters.

I begin to feel that if any man suggested to me that all this creation-house was built by an Infinite Power and an Infinite Intelligence, I should believe him. In very deed it seems like it; all the pieces are so vast; arithmetic endeavoured to calculate their distances, and having written an endless line of ciphers, it threw down the chalk and ran away, because it could not express in words its own discoveries. Halt! come back, thou chalking, figure-making arithmetic, and read me this riddle. I call, the writer answers not. Arithmetic writes itself to the point of dumbness, and is silent before the magic ciphering of its own slate pencil. I am told that the distance between these burning torches is unnameable, unthinkable. A wise and popular astronomer has just told us that the sun is shrinking nine inches in bulk every day. How long has he been doing this? Since he began to burn. He looks as if he were as majestic and grand as ever. Who lighted him? who feeds him? what fuel does he need? Imagination has cast all the coal-pits of the world into the furnace of the sun, and in less than a second the entire capacity and growth of the coal-fields of the world has been consumed. Ay, and the world itself would have been consumed in the same moment. The sun takes next to no time doing some things; he could burn up any of the worlds that wait upon him like household servants, and not know that he had done anything. Oh, it is an infinite cauldron! Who made it? "Nobody." I cannot follow you when you give me that mocking answer. Whatever force, secret, mystery, personality arranged all these things must have had a wonderful eye to adaptation: the things belong so clearly to one another; why, if the woman who keeps the universe were to lose one of her star pieces, she would light a candle and sweep the house of the universe diligently until she found it: the missing one is the completing one, the missing one is always the necessary one, necessary in some direction, if not in others. The father could not rest until the prodigal came back; the universe could not keep up its orderly, methodical, economical movement, and arrangement if one little screw should be lost out of the intricate machinery. We are told that to lift a hand is to

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send waves of motion to the sun, to lift an arm is to send a shudder to the stars; we are told that all things are so related as to find in each other a supplement or a complement or a very subtle satisfaction. Who arranged it all? "Nobody." On my soul and honour, this harumscarum confusion is a greater mystery to me than a million gods would be. All is so poetical, so ideal, so complete or so moving on towards completion, that I could believe God had never left this child-universe, and that He is still watching over all its nursery movements and all its preliminary education, and that He intends to bring it into sanctification and completeness of heaven. That would make no strain upon my reason; on the contrary, my reason would be satisfied by such an arrangement, because it would seem to be obvious, natural, right. God is as great in detail as He is in the totality and massiveness of things, I read in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis a most astounding thing: that God said "Let there be light," and He made the grass, and there is no sense of anticlimax or retrocession in the action of Divine power. When the great poem-writer or historian told me that the Infinite Jehovah came forth from His invisible and infinite chambers to make light, and suns, moons, stars, canopies, firmaments, I thought the speech equal to the occasion; but when the same poet-historian wanted me to believe that the creator of light was also the maker of the grass he stunned me. But I have recovered myself; I see the beauty of that arrangement; God is furnishing a house for someone, and He will not leave that someone to find the grass; if God undertakes to furnish a place it will be well furnished and completely furnished, and not only will there be great lights and great spaces, but man will not be asked to create one blade of grass, it shall all be done for him. Who did it? "Nobody!" I do not know into what intellectual consternation and confusion the first man would have been thrown if he ventured to ask who did all this? and a voice had shaped itself out of the infinite void, saying, "Nobody, no one, no personality; the thing just happened, it fell into this shape, and this organism, and this geometry, and into all these trees and shrubs and plants, and all these grassblades;

it so tumbled out!" There are some things that cannot be believed; it is not only difficult to believe them, they do not come within the sphere or reach of belief; they are not difficult, they are impossible, they are not on the outside rim of belief, they are away from it, utterly detached, without relation to the great action of faith, belief, or projection into another personality.

God came nearer still to us in the work which He made and which He ended. He incarnated Himself, He infleshed Himself, He embodied Himself. There stands the incarnation! What is his name? Adam—"God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God created He him." That is the daring solution of the great problem of human existence as given by the Bible. The Bible is not content with little answers to great questions, the Bible accepts the responsibility of saying, That man standing there, upright, with eyes that search the heavens, is God embodied, incarnated, set within such and such limits. The Bible is a bold book; the audacity of the Bible is the argument of the Bible. It touches nothing with a loose hand, it makes no dim and frivolous guesses. I do not wonder at some men trembling before the Biblical dogmas, for they are terrible, awesome. "In the beginning God created the heavens . . . in the beginning God created man." You cannot have an indifferent or wavering opinion about such dogmas; they kill you or they make you alive. Adam, who made you? Nobody! I repeat there are some things that cannot be believed, that cannot be brought within the region of faith; and that things are self-made, and that man was self-created, are propositions which must take rank with these unbelievable and futile suggestions.

In all the work which He wrought did He ever speak? He spake all the time. Sometimes I think there is a sound as of subdued singing, a suppressed psalm running through all the action of the creation. "God said"—then He spake? Yes; all things start in the word. Did not man make words? No; all the words were made before man came upon the scene at all. They were such great words that the first

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Speaker used in the making of His heaven-and-earth house. "Let there be." Was the verb *To be* called in so early as that? Yes, you cannot move one step in language that is worth taking unless you call in the aid of the verb *To be*. You may have to call it in first of all in the imperative mood; that verb creates a great space for itself, that verb is the verb out of which all other words are struck. And God said, "It is very good." What does "good" mean? We must get back to original definitions and limitations before we can define that word. You owe it to the first chapter in the Bible. It is not for us to make a dictionary and to define good; it is an indefinable term, it is one of the aboriginal words, it came almost instantaneously into what we now call human speech. Let there be . . . and there was . . . and it was good. Who can with sufficient rapidity, nay, with suitable astronomic velocity, pronounce that whole three-fold action? There are sentences that are to be punctuated by millenniums, but here are sentences that seem to have been poured out instantaneously, completely, and at once from the fountain of the Divine expression.

God not only said, God blessed; so to say, He laid His gracious right hand upon the things and said to each, Very good; take thy place, work out the purpose which I have written in the plasm of thine heart. God not only said, and blessed, God called: gave names to things, gave names to great spaces and left some little small pieces of things which we might name, but all the great broad names, names of comprehension, names that grasp the totality and the destiny of things, He Himself made. Looking up at the firmament, He said, Call it Heaven; looking at the light, He said, Call it Day, and no man could change it; there are fixed appointments which man cannot meddle with. And seeing the darkness, with all the host of glittering stars, He said, Call it Night; and beholding the sun, He said, Call it the ruler of the day; watching the gentle maiden moon swimming into the night gloom, He said, It is the queen of night, let her rule the night; and He called one greater and another lesser, and thus introduced what has become in our hands an almost science of invidiousness. The

moon did not complain that she was the ruler of the night, nor did the sun boast that he held the sovereignty of the day: we ought to accept our appointments and talents and our dowries in a spirit of love, under a sense of justice, and should recognise in the diversity of gift and talent and sphere and opportunity the action of a beneficent and all-watching and all-redeeming and all-judging Providence.

We are invited, therefore, by a meditation like this not to go into eternity, the metaphysical and unthinkable eternity, to find God; we are invited to stand before the first molehill, before the first time-written rock that tells its tale in facial moss; we are invited to go out into the twilight and to ask, Who did this, who built this, who keeps this in order, who guarantees that these planets will not fall on this head? Surely the argument upon which the Christian faith is built is eminently reasonable, it is an argument which we apply along the whole line of our experience; then when we come into the deeper mysteries, the great spiritual verities, we are prepared to enter the holy of holies just in the degree in which we have carefully, intelligently, and lovingly walked along the line of what may be called natural creation and natural phenomena. If we have been reverent along that line we shall hear greater mysteries still: but some men cannot be reverent, therefore they hear no more than the irrational brute beast can hear; they could pass a thousand Horebs and see no burning bush, they could see a burning bush and pay no heed to it. Other men find the sanctuary in the mountain itself, they seem almost naturally to uncover their heads before the great spaces and the great altitudes, and to say, Let us pray. To such men further revelation will be given; if we revere along the lower lines of inquiry we shall be called to higher worship and into larger sanctuary. We have been told that God made man, and we felt no difficulty in believing it, because man was so upright; that God made man in His own image, and we felt no difficulty in believing it, because man was so noble, his face glowed with such an intelligence, there was a fire in his eyes and behind his eyes, there

was a sparkle in his red blood which he himself never introduced into the crimson fluid.

We are asked in the New Testament to believe that God redeemed man. In very deed redemption is implied in creation. Never forget that words have not only a superficial meaning but an implied meaning, an enfolded and concealed meaning, which must be taken out and allowed to develop in all the fulness of their beauty and poetry. So read, created means redeemed, as the beginning means the end. We are told in the New Testament that God inspires man; we read that Jesus Christ sent the Holy Ghost, the inspirer, the fire-baptist, the interpreter of truth, the discloser of the visions of God brighter than Ezekiel saw when he tarried and dreamed beside Kedar. And it looks as if that might be true, because there are prophet minds, interpreting minds, far-sighted minds, men who have the gift of insight and the gift of dream and the gift of vision and of prophecy; and when we read the words of such men rising into mountains, glowing into poetry, if we should be told that such men were under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we need have no difficulty in believing it. And we are told finally that God not only created man, redeemed man, inspired man, but that God means to sanctify man, to get him out of the devil's school and from under the devil's discipline, and to make him consecrated and holy and pure; that God means that in the soul of man there shall be such a love of purity that impurity can find no place in it. God not only attacks the impure, He establishes the pure; He not only drives out the devil, He sets up His own throne. The action of regeneration, justification, and sanctification is at once negative and positive. Nehemiah said there was much rubbish to be taken away before he began to build the wall: God has much rubbish to remove out of our soul before He can build His Sinai and found His Calvary and establish His kingdom. Some of us are at this stage of the process, and some at that; let no man boast over another or sneer at another; we are not all at the same point of education, but we are under the same Educator. God is a patient teacher, and He will not rest until the slowest of His pupils can pronounce His Name and do His Work.

[*Thursday Morning, 2nd March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

THOU hast given unto us this body of abasement, but by the power of the resurrection of Christ it shall become a spiritual body and a veritable temple of the Trinity. We would not despise the body, but we would know that it came from the dust and is doomed to return to it. May we so live that our bodies may become as temples of the Holy Ghost ; may we know that God dwelleth in us, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit ; may we be sanctified body, soul, and spirit, as if we were all one man in Christ Jesus, and may we be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, glorious through the cleansing blood of the Lamb ; we would be without spot or wrinkle, we would be blameless and faultless before God, and thus would we complete the miracle of Christ and bring honour and glory to Him who has redeemed us from our sin and from our abasement. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done ; but if we confess our sins Thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us with the precious blood from all unrighteousness. Our hope is in the Cross, our joy is in the Resurrection ; we preach Jesus and the Resurrection, and Incarnation, and the upraising from the dead, and in that living temple we would spend our immortality. Forgive the sins of Thy people—many and great, the sins of the heart and of the tongue, the unspoken sins and the sins that are obvious and palpable ; and let the cleansing power of the blood be felt through all our manhood, making our nature clean and white with the beauty and the holiness of God. Remember not our sins against us ; Thou hast seen strange things in Thy Church : women ravished in Zion, and maids in the city of Judah, and, behold, the walls of Zion have been desolate, and foxes have walked thereon ; and our sins have rolled over us, and beggars have ridden before us, and behold, the daughters of music have been smitten dumb because of the growing iniquity of Thy Church. Yet Thou wilt not utterly reject her, Thou wilt come again to her and find her in the wilderness, and lead her by the gleaming of the Cross to the Canaan of perfectness and rest. As for the enemies of my Lord, He will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Arise, O Lord, let Thine enemies be scattered, and sling them as a stone out of the middle of the sling. Amen.

CLXXXI.

GOD AND THE BODY.

“God giveth it a body.”—I COR. xv. 38.



THEN the body is not the “it.” Let us recognise that truth, and find in it mystery and poetry and rest. “God giveth it a body,” and yet the body is the only part we ever see. Why so? Because we look at everything through the body; the body can only see the body; no man has ever seen his own soul. Yet man is continually conducting a kind of dialogue with himself:—“Bless the Lord, O my soul”: there is a voice, then, addressing the soul; in this sentence it is not the soul that speaks, it is a power, personality, or influence that speaks to the soul. “Praise the Lord, O my soul.” We have a common expression amongst ourselves: “I said to myself”: what is the difference between the “self” and the “I” in that sentence? Is not the *I* the *self*? Sometimes we distribute our self into body, soul, and spirit: we must have a trinity; you may blot it out of your creeds, but you retain it in your consciousness and in your experience; the creed comes before all other things. There are some things we do not invent; they were not made by hands, by hands they cannot be spoiled or thrown down. We go back upon the sanctuary of the eternal, and find that most things have been done for us. All our members were written in God’s book before they were created; and man, when he came upon the scene, had nothing to do but to keep a garden and to dress it. Surely he planted the garden? Not a root, not a seed, not a shrub; God never left man to do that work; He created the garden, and then put man into it to dress it and to keep it. Man has never been other than one of God’s hired souls set to do certain work. Man never lighted a star, never created a flower, though he has come very near

to persuading himself that some of the flowers have been practically created by him. He does well to insert the qualifying word "practically," because all the seed was the creation of God, and all the speech and all the music; and it is quite astonishing how little God left his journeyman to do. As for the body, it is the creation of God. The "it" is more important than the body; the man is more important than his clothes; the hand is more important than the glove it wears; and the *it*, that anonymous, mysterious, subtle, metaphysical, energetic, restless entity called *it*, will survive the body, and may watch it, maybe, going down into that deepest and blackest of all pits which we call the grave; who knows what tender or kindly farewell the *it* may speak as the body goes back to its dust, and the *it* returns to the God that made it?

"A body." Sometimes we read of *the* will of God; the sentence ought in many instances to be *a* will of God. When we read, This is the will of God concerning you, we should read, This is a will of God concerning you, one of His wills, one of the ways of bringing you to obedience: He hath a thousand, ten thousand, ways of expressing His will, and this is one of them. So when we speak of the body we are only really speaking of a body, another body. How many bodies has the Lord made? Take the largest, take the smallest, and say of each, This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. Man is so taken up with his own body that he is apt to forget in a very large measure, or to remember in only an academic way, that there are other bodies as fearfully and wonderfully made as his own. How many bodies hath God given the *it* of life? Here is a body all feathers, and not a feather was made by man; all the little downy feathers fell from the sky, and clothed the inward *it*, whatever that inward *it* may be. And here is another body without a feather: can there be another body different from the body we have seen? There is the body plainly standing right before your very eyes, not a feather on it! Here is a body all wool and almost all feather, a kind of outspread and elaborated feather, so warm, so comfortable and comforting. Can it fly? No; the feather body will fly. And here is a

body all muscle or all skin. God hath made it a body; take care how you step on that body, it is the building of God. An insect has a theology behind it, a Divine purpose, an infinite sovereignty; every pulse is a beat of the Divine heart. And how adapted these bodies are to various conditions! Here is one that lives in the water; it could not live out of the water, has never seen the land; if able to speak it would deny that there is any land; for men do that kind of denial; men are so fluent in denying the existence they have never seen; it is a human frailty; it is so broad a mistake that sometimes we are tempted to describe it as a crime. And here is a body that was made for the air: what is it resting upon? Upon nothing that is apparent. How does it poise itself on these great heights? By its wings. Who made the wings? God? The flying fowl and the submerged whale, did God make them both? Yes; all life is from God. And some kind of life can live only in darkness, and other kinds of life can live only in light. Other lives can live only in the ice; they hug the snow, and God has clothed them well before He made them to hug that cold lover. And some lives can live only in heat; their cry is, More heat, more tropical heat! we will answer the fire, we will pray our souls out in gratitude to the burning ardour. Do you call all these embodied lives? Yes, every one of them. Who made them to differ? God: and why do you go a fool's errand to find out some other origin and beginning of these things? I can spare you a little while: take your Sunday walk, you will come back at the last and say, After all, there is no explanation equal to GOD.

“Giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.” He must always be pleased; there cannot be two kings upon the throne of the universe; God never asks any man to share His throne with Him in the government of things: Providence is one, an integer that cannot be broken up into fractions or decimals: and we have to come to that conclusion; after all our wandering, we come back travel-stained and travel-worn, we put off our sandals and set our staff in its place in the corner, and then we say, Reach me down the old book, out of which all

other good books were made, and let me read this infinite science and gospel, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

What, then, is common to all these bodies and all these entities, what is the common denomination in which all these fractions stand? LIFE! Who has seen life? Nobody. Who can define life? No one. You never can define the truly great: you can define living, but not life; loving, but not love; godliness, but not God. There are some private chambers in the creation the doors of which we may not open. God is the creator of life, and in Christ Jesus He came to give man more life and life more abundantly, in wave upon wave, and billow upon billow, and ocean rolling over the shoulders of ocean: all life. There is no death in God.

God has given His own life a body. God always illustrates His own doctrine, and gives object-lessons in His own science. God has always been writing in white letters upon a black background. God has given Himself a body. Have we seen it? We have seen nothing else. Where is it? Everywhere. He who has seen only dust has not seen the very world he lives in; he who has seen only the surface of things has seen nothing, he can explain nothing, he can worship nothing, he has not seen enough to draw out his soul in religious adoration and expectancy. What is the body of God? Creation; all the things that are above us and around us and beneath us are endeavouring to express in visible form and symbol the It whose heart throbs and quivers through creation. I see God in all stars and flowers, in all angels and ravenous beasts, in all crystal temples and in all wild wildernesses and jungles; I see Him in the cultivated flower, on which He often smiles to see how poor a workman his little Adam is; and I see Him in the wild wayside flower, which bears more evidently to the observing and religious eye the signature of God. God comes to us in snow and in violets, in all colours, in all events; history is His tabernacle, providence His altar, life His throne: these are not Himself; the glove is not the hand, the house is not the occupant, the body is not the soul: creation is

not God. God is within creation, and beyond it outside it, above it, beneath it, around it: but creation is not God; God is a Spirit; God incarnated Himself in Adam; the whole Trinity was in that one Man, and that one man was a duality, "male and female created He him." How was Adam an incarnation of God? Because the Bible tells us that God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, in Our image and likeness was Adam made. We have no explanation, we have only a fact; if we could accept facts, and let explanations alone the Church would have next to nothing to do in the way of controversy, it would be reduced to the ministry of charity, to the holy apostleship of love and service.

God was supremely and gloriously incarnated, embodied in Christ. In Christ dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. God gave Himself a body when He caused Christ to be born of the Virgin, and to go forth that He might redeem with blood the self-enslaved and self-destroyed race of man. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; there is no other true and adequate explanation of Christ. Until you have come to His Deity—I speak now from the standpoint of my own conviction—you have not even begun to explain in any degree the mystery which goes through all the life of the world by the name of Christ. In Him was all fulness; all things are created by Him and for Him, and without Him was not anything made that is made. With these assurances, apostolically given, I can have no hesitation whatever in accepting Jesus Christ as God. He was the body of God, He was the impersonation of God, He did the work of God; He created by healing, He redeemed by sacrifice, He broke His heart that ours might not be broken, He died in the ineffable darkness that we might never know the meaning of such night as that which enshrouded His orphaned soul. I could not preach a merely human Christ, I have nothing to say about a merely ethical Christ. I do not believe in these little Greek words such as ethic and ethical as being terms that cover the personality and ministry of my Saviour; I must call for other terms, and if any man should

suggest that the right terms are, my Lord, and my God, I would feel that he had risen to the height of this great argument.

Now man embodies himself. Man has a body, but is a soul, and man having a soul, that soul goes forth day by day to repeat as he may be able, and in his own limited degree, the mystery of incarnation. Why make this incarnation a mystery to affright the soul when it might be made into a mystery greatly to comfort and elevate the soul? Man is doing in his own little way precisely this great miracle of body-making, incarnation, self-projection into other forms, images, and expressions. Has man a high intellectual and spiritual mood? Is he really a child of light and of music? I think so, because I have read his book called Poetry, and in that book he becomes almost translucent, transparent sometimes; in that book, which is himself at his best, he is more a spirit than a body, he seems to hover between the thing and the thought, the earth and the heaven; why, you spake a moment ago about winged bodies, surely this man has taken to himself wings. He has; the Poet is one of the supreme gifts of God. Here is a man who is giving body to another kind of thought; this other man is painting his soul, he is setting it forth in high colour and half-light and mysterious shadow, and is bringing night and day as it were face to face on that weird, but luring and fascinating canvas. What is he doing? He is giving his soul a body. Probably he will never be satisfied with the body, for the soul is more than he can paint. And probably the musician was never yet satisfied wholly and absolutely with his instrument; he could break it to pieces, because it cannot give that final touch which should make all other touches live; but he is trying to give his music-thought a body. And here is a man who is neither writing poetry nor painting pictures: whence did he come? Listen; he seems to be fond of metal and a hammer, and to have an arm of muscle, and he is looking about himself for something more. What is he doing? Shaping iron, making machinery, creating, almost, machines that shall approximate the utility and deft skill of the

human hand. What is he doing? Giving his mechanical thought a body. Could he not think about the matter within, and plan all that machinery, and say nothing about it? He could not; wherever there is a destiny there must be an expression of that destiny; and if a man is made to preach, he must preach; to paint, he must paint; he must give his soul and his particular limitation and quality of soul a body, form, shape, expression. We are all temple-builders. The great difficulty is that having seen the body many people think they have seen the thought, the spirit, the soul; many persons, having seen the body, want to see nothing more; many persons, having seen the Bible, think they have read it—the infinite mistake, a sophism over which the devil chuckles. Many persons are under the foolish impression that if they have seen a man, they have seen his soul; whereas if the man be really much a man, you must know him all his lifetime to know anything about him, and then when you breathe little farewells you must say, We will meet again and continue the loving acquaintanceship and perfect our communion in the heavens. Never be satisfied with the outside of things; prove all things, test, pierce, puncture all things; hold fast that which is good; make the left hand as strong as the right, lest anything of good should escape the clutch of your love.

There is a spiritual body. We cannot get away from the flesh-idea; we think we shall see our friends again just as we saw them in their ruddiest, sweetest, kindest health. Certainly not; we know where the body is, we know that the flesh is in the grave, we have heard the great, sweet voice say to us, Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But there is a spiritual body, a cellular tissue which is almost spiritual; that singular skeleton-man within the man, that cellular mystery of which the doctors know little, and which they approach, if right-minded men, with a kind of sacred reverence; a body within the body, a self within the self. When our Lord came again from the dead His disciples did not know Him. Mary supposed Him to be the gardener; she looked at Him, but did not see Him. The voice is the man, the tone is the soul, and one familiar

“Mary,” and a whole heaven was lighted up with instantaneous, cloudless light. So the spiritual body can only speak to the spirit that is in us ; blessed be God, it can so speak. There are times when we are conscious that a voice is talking to us without a body, and talking into our spirit ; there is a spiritual body that touches our spirits in their present incarnation ; and they speak to us, saying, Hold on a few hours more, yet a little while, and we shall see each other, not in the old fleshly way, but in a way ineffably better. And to help us in the meantime, look up when the stars are most visible and most glittering, and you may see in those mazes of light one like unto the Son of man—another like unto the friend you have momentarily lost.

[*Sunday Morning, 5th March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

WE bless Thee, Thou living Father, that in the end Thy salvation shall prosper, and that Jesus Christ, seeing of the travail of His soul, shall be satisfied. How long, O Lord, how long? The night is dark and the wind is cold, there are few voices of brightness and joy to be heard in the sullen and stormy wind. We thank Thee for any hint of morning, we bless Thee that the sun is not abolished, we thank Thee that the morn shall yet shine upon the earth, and the summer shall return, and the voice of singing birds shall be heard in the land. How long, O Lord, how long? The earth waits for Thee, waits for the light and the comfort and the noonday and the coronation. Thou hast set us to sow our seed on a windy day, when the earth is cold and all things are apparently against Thy kingdom, a resistance, a subtle and mighty persistence; but Thou wilt surely prevail. How long, O Lord, how long? The watchman brings us but poor news of the night, he declares it to be dark and stormy and bitter, and the wind smites him in the face, so that he dare hardly look out upon the field of the darkness. And yet Thou hast hidden a great promise in the human heart, and Thou hast filled the air with strange and delightful voices. Again and again we catch the lilt of the little child's voice, and the woman's song, and the hero's clarion cry, and we know that Thou art working out a great mystery of providence. How long, O Lord, how long? Let not our hearts fail us, let not our faith go down in the rough night, may we be kept and sustained and comforted and be found among Thy singing ones when the morning shall lighten the shore. O Thou that doest wondrous things, whose name is Wonderful, whose heart is mercy, forsake us not utterly, nor reject the Zion Thou hast redeemed with blood. We will not think of the darkness and the sorrow, the pain and the misery; these are but for a time. Thou hast marked their duration, Thou hast appointed the moment of departure, we hear Thy voice saying, Sorrow and sighing shall flee away. In the name of the Cross, in the name of the great valiant, redeeming Son of God, let sorrow and sighing soon stretch their wings and fly away and be forgotten. Amen.

SATAN IN HISTORY.

"And the Lord God said——"—GEN. ii. 18.

"And the serpent said——"—GEN. iii. 4.



AND between these two voices the education and discipline of man have been conducted from the first day until now. Never let us shut our eyes to facts. There is a temptation to avoid unpleasant subjects; such temptation is one of the devil's tricks; he says, It would never do for you to be talking about perdition and everlasting woe and the doom of sin and the personality of the devil; these are subjects to be overlooked or to be forgotten; you must entertain yourselves with songs of the light, with flowers of the summer, with the joys that you find here and there scattered over the face of history, and you must drink deep into those cups which bear the legend, Exhilaration and forgotten misery. Remember, it is the devil that whispers these suggestions; he says, in effect, Never think of me and never mention me and never let your thought turn in my direction at all; you go out into the meadows with all their flowers, and hear the birds and enjoy yourself all the long summer morning, and let me alone; let the theologians talk about me; but as for you, an ordinary member of the human race, never distress yourself with a difficult subject whilst you can sing a song or listen to the joking of a fool. What a pity to shut one's eyes and ears against facts!

"And the Lord God said——" "And the serpent said——," and they both spoke practically on the first page of the first book in the Bible; the devil was nearly as instantaneously present as was God. "And God said——." "And the serpent said ——," and sometimes they are blended and interblended, and you can hardly discriminate between one tone and the other. Why deny the fact? you live it: why not recognise it and reason about it and ask questions

concerning it? You know perfectly well that this morning the devil has been trying to lure your heart from the altar and to stifle the song that was rising in your throat. Some persons seem to think that the Bible creates the devil: the Bible only recognises him, just as the Bible only recognises God. The Bible does not create the Deity; the Deity is the reason of the Bible, not the Bible the reason of the Deity. The Bible is the greatest interpreter of facts; if we accept it in that capacity and light it will be a thousand volumes to us, containing everything worth knowing in all the evolution, tragedy, hell, heaven of human life. There is a most monstrous sophism wholly unaccounted for, which seems to say that if there were no theologians there would be no devil, if there were no Bible there would be no perdition. The exact contrary is the case: it is the Bible that warns us, that tells us exactly where we are to take care, that points out the lurking-places of the enemy, that paints the enemy in full figure and in full flush of colour. The Bible should therefore elicit our gratitude, as we would thank a man who on the mountains would tell us to take care, for the next step means chasm, abyss, and death. If I were riding in an unknown country and saw a warning on the hilltop, This road is dangerous, I would never think of imagining that the legend created the steep hill; I would say, The steep hill accounts for the legend; some man has seen that steep place, and generous counsel has expressed itself in this timely, kindly warning. Why not say the same about the Bible? The Bible says, Beware! be on the alert! watch! Why? This is a dangerous road, a favourite lurking-place of black, bad, cruel spirits.

If I look abroad upon the earth so far as it is accessible to my observation, I cannot but find proofs enough that there is an enemy, call him by what name you please, account for him as you like, deny him if you will; I cannot account for certain broad facts, events, collisions, tragedies, woes, losses, apart from the suggestion that there is an unslumbering enemy; I cannot trace everything to a good parent, I am not able yet to say that all things are pure, sweet, beneficent, healing, and full of blessedness. On

the contrary, I can say, There is an enemy here, or there, or yonder; God never dug a grave, God never inflicted pain; there must be behind all the pain which He inflicts a reason or a suggestion which refers to some other and alien and antagonistic and most cruel force. I could blind myself and thus deprive myself of many a sight of tragedy and bitterness and misery, but my deprivation of a sight of these things would not destroy the things themselves; when I draw down mine eyelids and shut out the sun I have not destroyed that luminary; so when I turn foolishly gay and laugh my misery out of my soul for one deceptive moment, I have not destroyed the misery which for the transient occasion I have modified or suppressed. Given human life, to account for its misery; given human experience, to account for its conscious sin. What is the best answer? The best answer I have ever yet seen is that "the serpent said." There is an author of evil.

It is wonderful how the Bible from beginning to end, from almost the first page to the last, broadly, definitely recognises the personality and ministry of an evil one. I would gladly deny his existence, I would gladly say to you, Fellow-men, never believe in evil or in the evil one; take another quaff of the boiling and foaming wine, jump higher in your dance in the air, and call them fools who preach and prate of hell and suffering and devil. I could in some mental moods and conditions say this to you, but I would retire from the rostrum to hate myself for having told you the blackest of lies. From beginning to end, I repeat, the Bible is full of the presence of this evil influence; the slime of the serpent is upon every page, his fang thrusts itself through all the rose leaves and summer beauty of life and time.

"The devil having put it into the heart of Judas" (John xiii. 2). That is a distinct recognition of an evil power. God never put that thought into the heart of Judas; God never told us to steal and lie and do dishonour to the spirit and the genius of holiness; this is none of God's doing; it is the doing of an enemy. "Healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts x. 38). Does not sickness come from God? No, none.

“ Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ” (Heb. ii. 14). The devil comes upon the stage at once ; he seems to have been just listening, and the moment his chance came he was there, at the ear of the woman, at the heart of her unsuspecting love. It did not take long to develop the evil one ; we hear nothing of him amongst trees and beasts and birds and creatures of the sea, but almost in the very moment in which we read that God created man in His own image the devil said, I will damn him ! There was such a voice as we never heard before, an oath shrieked. Of course it would be much more comfortable to avoid all mention of such subjects : I would rather get rid of the things themselves than get rid of the mention of them. Of course I would rather not speak about this awful disease that is eating up my love and my hope, never mention the awful name, never recognise the unnameable disease ; oh, no ! laugh, make a noise, chatter, tell the news of the day, never say cancer ! oh, never name it. I would rather get rid of the cancer than get rid of the naming of it. Oh, fool ! never to mention the devil because you want to hear of some clown thrusting his painted face through a coloured hoop. That is not wisdom, and it cannot end in good. Until we get back to fundamental facts we cannot preach the Gospel ; in fact, we shall have no Gospel to preach. It was not until “ the serpent said ” that another voice replied, “ The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.” The serpent speech is the first page, the first sentence, in the Christian theology.

It is very singular how graphically and definitely the existence of this foe is recognised in such passages as these :—“ The world lieth in the wicked one.” Pray do not mention him ! we are nervous, we are sensitive. But if the Lord had been nervous and sensitive He never would have come to destroy the works of the devil ; blessed be God, He does not suffer from our foolish hysterics and our pitiable and irrational nervousness. There is one great power described in Holy Writ as the prince of the power of the air ; there is a black assembly in the land, there is an author of plague and pestilence ; all these things are not to be

traced, as foolish and superficial economists would trace them, to bad drains and to ill-ventilation and to removable causes of a purely human or social kind. No, there is a prince of the power of the air, a fountain of evil influence, a personality of germs and bacilli and plasma of diseases. Do not be content with the superficial explanation that if somebody had kept his drain from becoming foul there would have been no cholera and no pestilence in the air; that may or may not be within proper limitations true as an accidental fact, but there is a wider philosophy, a profounder and truer explanation of things. There is a force—do not be so nervous as to shut your eyes to facts—that would kill you if it could, there is a thief that would steal your little child-bud, though he left the tree naked and bare and barren as ice; there is an evil beast that gets into our life and devours the lives without which our lives would be poor. There is a personality called in Scripture the prince of the power of the air and the prince of this world. His title is royal, he is never scoffed at, he is never undervalued by those who understand the constitution of the universe and reveal the providence and the redemptive grace of God. “We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world”—invisible, tremendous. We had better know it; and do not let us fluff our fur and put a head upon our wine and call for louder music and forget the enemy who never drinks, whose sobriety is part of his power. The Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples once, “Satan hath desired to have you.” The apostle in accounting for his not being able to visit certain churches said, “Satan hindered us.” The personality and ministry of this foe may be regarded as enough to account for the sin, the pain, the misery of the world. I have not been able to comfort my friends who have been stripped bare; for the moment I have been without faith and without hope and without light; I have not been able to write letters to my friends to tell them that all is well with the little child, the one child; I have said, “An enemy hath done this!” and it is along that line that men will find their chief comfort when they take that line in its proper relations and set it in its proper attitude and colour. Standing by the side of the little

dead lily, the only lily that grew in that house-garden, I have not hesitated to ask all who loved the lily to go out of the room, and I have stood beside the flower and kissed it, and said to its dead ear, "An enemy hath done this." Is there comfort in that declaration? There is no comfort in it when it is taken alone, detached, torn out of the setting of the universe; then there is nothing in it but pessimism and despair, black, sevenfold midnight. But we must not leave the case there:—"The Lord God said . . . the serpent said . . . and the Lord said." He had the last word, an interdiction and gracious promise, He then and there in the garden of Eden crushed the serpent's head. We must look at the sunnier side of life, but we shall see more of the sunshine in the degree in which we have seen most of the darkness. You never know what rest is until you have learned the mystery of labour; you never know how sweet your bread is until you have found the tooth of hunger gnawing your poor life; you never knew how warm your little house was until the ice struck your face and the cruel cold east wind almost forbade you to go out of your own door; when you struggled to that door and reached it and opened it you felt as if you had never seen a glowing fire before and never known what it was to have security and comfort. It is just so with these deeper, more tragical experiences of life: you never know how much you have had until you have felt the pain and misery of your loss.

Now as visibly in the one case as in the other there is certainly a good spirit abroad, a holy, redeeming spirit, a gentle, tender, sympathising spirit, a benign power that will not leave us until the red wound has been skinned over and until that skin has grown into a sufficient and permanent security. The Bible does not create God; I see God in providence, I see Him in my own life, I see Him in the family life of all my friends; He wants time for the development of His personality and the full revelation of His design and the complete outling and outsphering of His beneficent purpose. There is a Gulf Stream in the moral life and the conscious experience of the

world, a stream that seems to warm the air and to warm the sea: now and again we say, What a scent of flowers! there must be some garden near; now and then right across the currents of the north-east wind there comes a waft of Gulf Stream air, and we say, How is this? and sometimes when we are dumb with the evil spirit of hopeless misery there seems to come before us a white outline, an image we have seen before, a mysterious, comforting, anonymous personality, and we wrestle with it, and say, We will not let Thee go until Thou dost bless us. Do not imagine that the air is filled with evil spirits; the white spirits find room there for ministering to those who need a gospel fitted to misery and helplessness and shame. You love to hear of the redeeming spirit, the white-robed spirit, you shuddered awhile ago whilst the preacher descanted upon the evil one; you were wrong there, you should have taken all the meaning of the first part to your souls if you intend really to enjoy and apply the second part. Until you know the sin you do not know the mercy; until you have cried your very soul out in tears of penitence you can neither hear the Gospel nor receive it. There is a troubled joy in the world, that is to say, a joy that has trouble in it, a trouble that has a subtle joy in it; there is a sadness that has a joyousness quite of its own; there is a sadness which completes human gladness, redeeming it from folly and from selfishness and from narrowness and from sordidness. The fear of the Lord chastens, ennobles, sanctifies whatever it touches.

Remember that the power of the serpent is limited. He is chained, he cannot add one link to his chain; he cannot stretch it, it is not an elastic chain, it is inflexible. Now the comfort begins. Think of the devil as a chained dog; he wants to get at human life, but he can only get at it in proportion as he is permitted to approach it, and he can only be permitted in the providence of God for a time, and if he pile a thousand years it is but a thousand years he has piled; he cannot tempt the clock to strike another hour, he cannot prevail upon the spirit of time to give him one day more; it is a fixed devildom, blessed be God.

And the ministry of the evil one is educational if properly received. It teaches us what we are, what we may become, it teaches us our need of redeeming love, it teaches us the vanity of love, the transitoriness of the things upon which we lavish our affection. Jesus was tempted: that is one of our sources of inexpressible joy. We have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; He met the devil in the wilderness and overthrew him; He thrust through the evil heart of the enemy the sword of the Spirit. That sword is available to us; we need not write some witty answer of our own, the answer is written before the temptation is addressed to the soul. Put on the whole armour of God; stand in the panoply of heaven; do not undertake the case yourself, you are a poor match for the devil, he is older than you, he has seen more than you have ever seen, he was in things almost from the very beginning; do not therefore go to the reserve of your own wit or even your own experience, but search the Bible diligently to find exactly what the weapon is with which you can successfully encounter the deadly foe.

And the power of the devil is revelatory. It will help us to understand the larger and fuller side of things; it will help us to account for some things which otherwise would distress our faith; we are enabled now to say, An enemy hath done this; let both grow together until the harvest; an enemy has stolen from me my friend, has poisoned the fountain of affection, has troubled the stream of confidence; an enemy hath sent about this foolish and wicked report; an enemy has set friends against me who once firmly stood by my side; an enemy hath dug another grave in my poor little dwindling garden. But the enemy is under the power of the Friend; I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Satan has desired to have you, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. Satan can only do a certain amount of mischief; the amount of mischief shall return upon his own head; and one day, far off, we shall see how it was that without knowing it the enemy was one of our friends.

[*Thursday Morning, 9th March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALmighty GOD, deliver us from the evil influence of the man who supposes that he has seen everything; the Lord keep us far away from the man who counts the generations and watches the whirling of the winds : stablish our hearts in the sanctuary of Thy righteousness and Thy truth, and let Thy grace and Thy peace abound towards us like the billows of an infinite sea. We rejoice that we have seen nothing as it really is, in all the compass of its magnitude and all the subtlety of its suggestion ; we bless Thee that the insect is an unsolved problem ; we thank Thee that there is not a hair upon our head that we can fully read and from which we can extract the whole mystery of God ; we thank Thee for the eloquent silence, for the infinite wilderness, the possible garden of God : help us to stay ourselves upon Thy right arm and to trust to Thee, Thou Builder of the sun and of the Cross. Who can by searching find out God ? The Lord help us to rest in His own revelation given to us in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man. We thank Thee for a religion infinite, that cannot be sounded in all its unfathomable depths, that cannot be measured in all its towering heights : may the peace of God which passeth understanding fill our hearts and minds, may our wonder become worship, and our worship become wonder, as we stand in the unmeasured temple and listen to the ineffable silence. The Lord comfort us whilst we tarry in His house, the Lord give bread to the hungry, and water to him that is sore athirst ; and as for our aspirations, desires, and climbings after higher altitudes, the Lord undertake for us, and see that we fail not. We always pray at the Cross and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Name red as blood ; that Name must prevail. Amen.

CLXXXIII.

SEEN ALL.

"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun."—ECCLES. i. 14.



IN a certain broad, rough, superficial sense this is possible. It is ineffably disappointing ; it is spiritually and fruitfully, poetically and morally, most suggestive. It is easy to see what the man has been looking at ; he has, so to say, been counting the wrong things, or has been counting them in a wrong spirit, or has been longing for the end. Things are very much what we make them. To some men five loaves are five loaves, and not enough to go round the table ; to another man they are harvests, and a sufficiency for all the guests that can gather round the table of God. To one man two little fishes are but two little fishes ; to another man, the right man, who has eyes in his soul, the two little fishes are enough and more than enough, and no hunger can maintain its gnawing claims against them. There are bad counters, there are statisticians who reduce everything to nothingness and smoke and vanity ; they are not wanting in cleverness or industry or in the great faculty of comparing one set of tables with another ; up to that point they may be trusted and obeyed ; beyond that point they are weaker than other men ; they do not calculate by the right arithmetic ; their tables are not wrong, their tables are perfectly right so far as they go, but they do not go far enough, they are broken off at the wrong place, they cannot speak the upper language, they do not know the mystery and the utility of symbols. How disappointing it must be to a man to be able to count everything he has ! That man cannot be rich ; he may run up into numerable millions, but inasmuch as the millions are numerable they are no millions at all. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Life is not a question which you can double up in

your hand and say, I have secured it, and it is mine. Life is thought, feeling, poetry, expectancy, prayer, sympathy, the outcome of a holy discontent. There is a contentment that is mean, soulless, and utterly pitiable; there is a discontent that is ineffable, inspired, quick with holy ambition; not a foolish discontent, pining and whining, but a discontent which says, God meant me to see more and to be more and to do more, and I want to succeed in executing the full purpose of God. That is the Christian life, that is Christian prophecy, Christian discipline, and Christian perfectness.

A sad thing it is for a man to think he has seen all the landscape which lies before his window. He wants change of scene, and no wonder, for he has seen nothing; he wants change of air, and what wonder, if the air has brought him no music from the organ of the morning? There are some poets who have not yet seen the whole of their little back garden; there is hardly room in it for another geranium, but that little back garden is a three-volume romance, is the beginning of *Paradise Regained*, is a history of faithful industry and hopefulness, and is a pledge that the rest will be paid at God's counter in God's time. Horrible must be the feeling of satiety, an awful thing for the stomach to say, No more! I am surfeited, I cannot take more, let me alone. That is not fulness, it is satiety, surfeit, over-fulness, getting out of the very enjoyment into the very dissatisfaction of sufficiency. I have known a man drink so much wine that he did not know it was wine. That is the mischief of all measurable things, they come back and back upon themselves, until sufficiency becomes surfeit, and surfeit an intolerable distress of body, mind, and soul. Men at the beginning set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then they set forth that which is inferior, because the sense of judging is dull or destroyed, and mean wine goes for as much as good wine. There is a philosophy in that. That is the mischief of this world when detached, taken by itself, limited according to our notions and not according to the purpose of God. A man drinking wine until it ceases to be wine; a man having enjoyments natural,

legitimate, and perfectly proper in every way, but so using them, debasing them, that they become deprivations and mockeries and torments, and the keenest joy turned into a kind of perdition. That is always the case when we use the limitable apart from the illimitable, when we detach the finite, when we omit grace from the meat. A poor mumbling thing surely to say a blessing on the crust ! Certainly not ; it may be degraded into that, but grace before meat is philosophical, economical, spiritual, elevating, when done in the right sense and to the right end. " Took bread and looked up to heaven " ; what wonder that he had enough and more than enough, and choked the few baskets that were brought for the gathering up of the left portions ? So you may debase your little before-meat blessing ; you may even give it up ; the spirit of evil may so work upon you as to say in effect, This is a mere form, make it as brief as you possibly can ; really this is somewhat of a relic of an old age ; let us begin the smoking feast and leave the priest to say his prayer. There is no humour in that, nor wit, nor cleverness, nor worldliness, but a great deal of the other and lower world, an impoverishing and self-depriving world. A lifted eye before the tasted bread turns the supper into sacrament.

" I have seen all the letters of the alphabet." Can you read ? " No, but I have seen all the letters of the alphabet, and I know them one from another, and I can write every one of them in three different ways ; I am absolutely perfect in the use of the alphabet." Hear how this poor soul chatters about his alphabet ! He has counted the alphabet, he has seen all the letters that are written under the sun : the one thing he cannot do is to put the letters together, and turn them into syllables and words and sentences and poems and philosophies. Are we to take the criticism of such a man as an estimate of literature ? He is as perfect in his alphabet as Aristotle was in his. Aristotle could not teach this man anything about the alphabet that the man does not know already : the only thing is the man cannot read, cannot use his own alphabet, cannot employ his own tools. It is exactly so with many of us in the

Church; we know every letter in the creed, we know the creed so well that we can speak it fluently and unerringly at the very moment when we are turning round the church to see whether everybody is there and what everybody has got on; we know the creed perfectly, we have seen the whole creed letter by letter. Have you faith? That is another word; yes, and that is another question. The man has seen all the letters, but cannot read the literature of his country; a man has seen all the creed item by item, paragraph by paragraph, and clause by clause, and can recite the whole of it, but believe he never can. Are we to accept that man's account of the creed, of any creed, of any theory of human nature or human education? It is to me infinitely sad when men make creeds. I never signed one, I could no more sign a creed than I could voluntarily swallow poison. Creeds change, language changes, the same language is not the same thing to two different readers of it. But I pray, Lord, increase my faith, that spirit bigger than any creed, that spirit that never can be expressed in an organised catechism—that most horrible modern possibility of blasphemy. Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief. I do not write my creed in ink. Thou hast written it in Thine own red heart-blood. Enough! my faith would be as large as Thy love. Meantime, there are some persons who require all manner of elementary aid, and the elementary aid may be most valuable if limited to its proper function, if kept within its own strict purpose; it is then, up to the date of speech, right and good and useful. "When I was a child I thought as a child, I spake as a child; when I became a man I put away childish things."

I have seen a man have so much money that he had not enough. Let him stand before the tollkeeper of this turnpike; the charge for passing the tollgate is sixpence: can he pay the money? He cannot; hear him, for he hath a speech: "Allow me to pass, or give me change for this note, value one thousand pounds; it is all the money I have at command." He might as well hand a piece of blank paper to the toll-keeper, it is blank paper to that functionary; it is so

much as to be too little, it fails on the negative side, the plus quantity becomes a minus quantity. Hear the man : "Allow me to pass your tollgate ; I have a thousand acres in forty different counties in England : may I pass now ?" No. "Why not ?" The charge is sixpence ; if you have sixpence you can pass, though you never had an acre in any country in any part of the world. Is that so ? Yea, verily, and it happens every day in some form, with certain variation and adaptation of its meaning, that a man shall have so much that he might as well have nothing. Beware of the danger of accumulating in a way that misses utility and profitableness. "There is a young man who has just passed the tollgate ; why did you allow that man to pass and keep me standing out here ?" Because, sir, he had the sixpence, and you have only the thousand-pound note. A very strange thing ! Life is full of these contradictions and ironies and perplexities ; we had better get down to the solid rock of common sense and know that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, and get to know that he who has one little loaf of bread is better off in the time of hunger than the man who has ten thousand acres which have not yet brought forth their harvest. So there is a wealth that may be poverty, a poverty that may be wealth ; the terms must be defined before we can use them, and for this reason we had better know exactly what we mean by life and bread and truth. Jesus spake in parables, Jesus never spake mere prose, to Jesus there was no prose in all human speech ; He heard the accent as well as the word, the emphasis as well as the mean syllable, and He heard the speaker's voice as well as the speaker's vocables, so that the poor woman might represent to Him an army vast enough to overthrow the gates of heaven and take the city by permitted violence.

I have seen a man so self-important that he could do without prayer. The most self-conceited person upon earth is the atheist ; the most bump-tious, intolerable nuisance of a man is he who can do without the heavens and be self-contained within his own coat. He calls it rational, anti-superstitious ; he is not a churchgoing man, he

is not bound by your religious limitations, neither is he enlarged by them. That, if you make a complete analysis of it, is insufferable self-conceit. True modesty must pray, real intelligent self-distrust must go out to find in another its supplement, its completion, and its glory. Prayer is modesty; irreligion is immodesty, insolence, conceit, contemptuousness. This view of the non-religious life ought to be more and more carefully considered. It is more intellectually defiant not to believe than it is to believe, it is more impudent not to have a God than it is to have ten thousand. Is there a more pitiable wretch on the face of the whole earth than the man who feels that he needs no God, he does not require to pray, he can take his bread without a blessing, he can fall asleep without committing himself to the gracious Power unseen but ever-present? That is idolatry meaner than the idolatry of any savage country unevangelised or unvisited by Christian education and service. If you would be modest, really and genuinely modest, then you must go out of yourselves and find your completeness and perfectness in Another, and that Other none other than the living God made known to us in the person and in the atonement, in the teaching and in the priesthood of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun.” Yes, we repeat, in a broad superficial way you have done so, but no man has yet seen anything as he ought to see it, and if any man think that he knoweth anything as he ought to know that man’s boasting is in vain. This is the apostolic doctrine. You have not seen a grain of sand yet; philosophy has been for ages in search of the ultimate atom, and is as far from it as when it began; and lexicography cants uphill after its polysyllables, and cannot define life, love, faith.

There is no satisfaction in the finite. Why does not man find satisfaction in the finite? Because he himself is not finite in the same sense, he is finite in another and better sense, but man stands next to God in the great catalogue of names:—“In the beginning God created man in His own image and

likeness, in the image and likeness of God created He him." The sea is finite, but not the sailor; the sailor is finite in another sense, but he has an ocean beyond an ocean, a shore beyond a shore; there is a sounding in him of the roar and throb of another sea. If it be not so we are the victims of a mockery that ought never to be pardoned; it cannot be that God has made us so much and intends at a certain limited point to break us off and laugh us into eternal oblivion; it cannot; every drop of red blood says so, every throb of the aching heart declares it, the whole soul rises in angriest passion against the murderous blasphemy. The seen is meant to be an emblem of the unseen; the things we see are hints of the things we cannot yet discern; we are living in a region of beginnings; by the very greatness of our nature we claim to be immortal, by the very passion of our desires we know that no good power can have given us so much with the intention of finally disappointing us. The question is not, Will we pray? we must pray, in our own form of prayer and in our own way of prayer, but there is an outgoing of the heart after God and heaven and unquenchable glory of light; it is part of our very nature, it is revelation appealing to intuition, it is intuition responding to revelation, it is one light mingling with another and creating light above the brightness of the sun. We are finite in the measurable sense, we are sons of God if so be we have received the Cross of Christ in all the fulness of its atoning, redeeming meaning. The sun consumes himself by his very glory, he is dying of his own heat, he is doomed to vanish, but the soul lives on unspeakable and unnameable resources and guarantees of life, and must go on according to the duration of God.

Who, then, will show us any good? We can only find an answer to that in the Bible. The Bible was written to show us good, to show us what we are, to reveal us to ourselves, to show what God is to us and what we may be to God. There is a man in history who tasted everything, who saw everything according to his opportunity, who held not his heart from any good, piled the

material and finite creation around him, and having seen it, tasted it, become surfeited by it, having wallowed in the misery of his wealth, he said: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Why should we go and conduct a similar experiment? We believe the traveller when he comes back from the sea and from the wilderness, we accept his map and his names, his rivers and his mountains, and we construct all such information into a science which we call geography; and yet when Solomon comes back from his wilderness we do not believe him; the fool who hears his report says, "I will go and see if it be true in my case." That is waste of time, that is a prodigal expenditure and misuse of history. Why not, seeing you have collected all these voyagers' accounts of places and distances and called them by the name geography, why not collect the experience of the world, the experience of the greatest, best men, and hear them say, It is not in dust to satisfy intelligence, it is not in material things to satisfy spiritual yearnings, it is not in earth to supply even an outline of heaven? Why not accept human experience and construct it into a science of theology, a science of true living, a science of veritable wisdom? If we do so, we shall be very rich; and if we fail to do this, we shall be very poor.

[*Sunday Morning, 12th March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

GREAT Father of spirits, in Thee we live and move and have our being, though we know it not. There are times when we do not see Thee in our life, nor feel Thee in our heart, nor know Thy presence amid the tumult of time and all the things which belong to the hour of distress. Now and again Thou dost permit us to see Thee as it were face to face ; Thou art near at hand and not afar off, we feel Thee in every pulse of our immortality, and we say, This is none other than the house of God. We bless Thee for the moment of vision, we thank Thee when there are wordless voices singing in the temple of the heart, comforting us with music from afar : may we know that Thou art at the centre of things, may our uppermost note be, The Lord reigneth. Behold, there are evil ones in Thine empire, spirits of darkness, princes of the power of this world, but they are all under Thy control, and Thou canst set Thy foot upon them and crush them ; if for a little while Thou dost permit them to rule over us, and fill us with distress and unutterable sorrow and sense of desolation and solitude and misery, behold Thou art coming along the paths of the night, and the morning shall attest Thy presence, and all things shall sing when the light rises. We want to feel that Thou art our living Father, the eternal God, our refuge in ages past, our hope for years to come. Thou canst work this happy consciousness in the heart of every one, Thou canst clear away the cloud, and the doubt, and the fear, and bring in the full summer morning, the very clouds turned into glory. When we are in great distress and in sorrow, may we not give up our faith, may we cry tremblingly and with tears, Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief ! lest Satan get an advantage over us and trample our faith under his feet and mock the very Cross on which we are crucified with Christ : the Lord send to us some fit angel, well equipped with messages of light from heaven ; O send us some radiant daughter of God who can calm the tumult of our heart and reveal to us the mystery which is full of trouble. Wherein we have seen Thee in times that are gone we are rich and glad and grateful ; surely we have seen the Lord, most truly we have wrestled with the unseen One, and He has suffered us to overcome Him in holy violence, and He has changed our name and given us a new certificate and a new authority in life : this is the Lord's doing, a great surprise, a perpetual comfort, an inexhaustible consolation. If we might be permitted to give ourselves again to Thee in holy

vow and tender assurance of ever-increasing love, we should go forth from Thy sanctuary like soldiers clad and equipped of the Word. Teach us that the battle is but for a little time and that the victory is for ever; give us assurance that the storm is crying itself to rest, and by-and-by we shall be brought into the holy places of which it shall be said, There shall be no more sea. Sanctify to us all our losses, troubles, distresses, and pains and miseries of every kind; may we be the stronger for our weakness, may our eyes be the clearer because of the tears which have washed and expressed all their feeling of agony and distress. If any man here be feeling after God if haply he may find Him, may this be the moment of discovery, the morning of revelation, the true resurrection of the rising again from the dead of things lost for one brief moment. We all need comfort, inspiration, encouragement, assurance of Thy nearness and some guarantee of Thy presence to help in every time of need. We give one another into Thy tender keeping, hand seizes hand, and all cling around the Cross in one cordon of grateful tender love; and whilst we gaze at the bleeding Sacrifice we are sure that our faith will be rewarded by an infinite answer of peace. The Lord make the old man young, and the little child glad with a truer joy, and fill the empty house with blessed presences; and guide the life that stumbles and falls because of momentary weakness; and when it is all over tell us in the upper school how it was and what Thou didst mean. Amen.

CLXXXIV.

DIVINELY GIRDED.

"I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me."—ISAIAH xlv. 5.



ANY things are done without our intelligence. Our intelligence is oftentimes our only difficulty and only danger. It would often be happier for us if we had no heads. We are ruined by what we think we do know, and if any man thinketh he knoweth anything as it really is, he knows nothing. How satisfactory, however, it is now and again to come squarely down upon a definite and simple explana-

tion of things; how refreshing to meet a man who has a straightforward answer to our most painful questions: there is conviction in his very tone, insincerity could not speak in that voice, we could detect a mocking mimicry. "My sheep know My voice"; we know the voice of the Shepherd, of the shepherd-heart, the shepherd-tenderness, the shepherd-love. There are many imitations, but there is only one true voice from heaven; there are many echoes, there is only one voice: blessed are they who hear it and understand its message and respond to all its implications. The Bible is full of explanations that are clear, simple, definite, and final. There is no book so final as the Bible. There are times when we want the final voice; that is to say, a voice which we feel is final; there cannot be anything beyond it that is contrary to it. That is the strength of every message, that is the sole power of every true ministry. A man who is uncertain of his message had better not deliver it.

How satisfactory it is, furthermore, to have an explanation which is self-satisfying, an explanation which brings with it its own confirmation. You know what that is in the simple matter of a riddle. You do not know the answer, but the moment the answer is given you know whether it is sufficient. Why not reason from so simple an instance up to the higher ranges and levels of thinking? There is a verifying power in man; the truth is known by the soul which God created; the outside listener said to Christ once, "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth." We know the truth when we hear it. If we mix it up partly with our own intelligence and partly with our own cleverness, and if we compare it with our own prejudices and partial and foolish education, we may get trouble and bewilderment; but if we come into the sanctuary of God with a simple open child-heart, we shall make no mistakes. The philosopher may often get wrong; the child is nearer infallibility than any philosopher who has wrought his way by pedantic and academic methods and struggles to some lame conclusion. Take that simple matter of a riddle; let an inadequate answer be given to it, and you will detect the inadequacy in a moment; let an adequate answer

be given, and you will receive it with applause and confirmation, saying, in effect if not in words, That is so, I never saw it until this moment, but now you give me the answer to the riddle I feel that the riddle is subtle and the answer is profound and satisfactory. It is thus we know the Bible: it is thus we test the great replies of the Bible to our riddles, difficulties, and perplexities multitudinous and mutually hostile and ever-conflicting. We know the truth when we hear it; the heart gives a great shout of Yes! the heart then, simple, candid, frank, unprejudiced, is no fool. Sometimes we call it instinct. Where did you get that word from? Not from the Bible. I am suspicious of all words used religiously which are not to be found within the four corners of the Book of God. Always speak of Bible things in Bible words, and you will take the shortest course to the point of light and rest.

Not only is it good to have a simple and definite explanation, and an explanation obviously adequate, but still further is it good to have an explanation that is simple, adequate, and gracious. Where should we be without grace? Where would the flowers be without dew? In many a character it is grace that is wanting; there is great intellectual force, but no grace. Sometimes grace may be expressed by fire, intelligence, great mutual love and sympathy. This is characteristic of the answers or explanations given in the Bible. The law came by Moses, a man whose head was cut out of a rock, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, Child of the Virgin. We all have known men who were intellectually competent to undertake any high duty or daring enterprise, yet we could not trust them; simply because life is not a question of intellectual ascendancy and force; life includes that in some modified or sanctified form, but the generalship of life means grace, shepherdliness, tenderness, condescension, sympathy. Even giants were rocked in the cradle of love, dandled in the arms and on the knees of motherly affection; they would have been poor giants but for their mother's milk.

The answers of the Bible, therefore, to the great

riddles of life are simple, adequate, and gracious; thus combining the three attributes of a sufficiency that at once satisfies and thrills the heart.

Now if for a moment we close the Bible and look at life as we see it in its daily course we still need an explanation of that life. Life is a riddle; look at it how you may, life is a mystery. You may, for a moment close the Bible and silence every theological speaker, there remains human daily life, a riddle, a perplexity, a mystery, a hell, a heaven. It is not as if we could get rid of the mystery by closing the Bible; the Bible did not make the mystery; the Bible answers the mystery, not creates it. There are the broad, naked, ghastly facts; how to account for them, how to make the best of them, how to get out of this dark thicket without being torn to pieces by the thorns and briers. Take such facts as are known to every one. Take, for example, the survival of the weakest child; we speak of the survival of the fittest, but there is a survival also of the unlikeliest. Is the child still living, that child of whom you spoke to me some time ago in a tone almost of despair? Yes, the child is still living; what is more, he is the strongest child in the family. How do you account for it? I cannot account for such a remarkable circumstance; the child was carried about upon a pillow; every adviser spoke of the case in a tone of despair; the child did not grow, the child was utterly feeble; sometimes, the mother continues, I have looked to see whether the child really was alive. And how is it to-day? I have told you that to-day he is the most blooming child in the family; he can run, he can enter into all the games and occupations of the boys at the school and in his neighbourhood, and he is really amongst the halest and heartiest of them all. Did you get that fact out of the Bible? No, I got that fact out of my own house. Then there are some facts outside the Bible that need explanation? Undoubtedly. What is the explanation? The mother cannot tell, the doctor says he is simply astounded, every probability has been upset in the case. Or take such a fact as the death of the unlikeliest. Here is a person with whose name you never associated the idea of death; to speak of that name

and of death would be to do violence to the structure of language; where is that image and symbol of health now? Dead. But that is impossible. It is a fact. How do you account for it? None can tell, every one is surprised and astounded. We speak of the survival of the fittest, but here is the survival of the unlikeliest, and here, secondly, is the death of one who was supposed to be outside the range of such miserable influence and such ghastly destiny. How do you account for it? There is no account that is simple, satisfactory, and gracious to be given of such an event. The only voice I have heard upon the subject which satisfies me without being gracious is, An enemy hath done this; an enemy with a short range, an enemy whose head shall be bruised. If that is an explanation it is only an explanation which touches one of the three attributes of a sufficing explanation; it is simple, and it is adequate for the moment, but it is not gracious; it has been done outside the boundary and method of love; it is a triumph of cruelty, it is the devil's holiday. Take such facts as the escape of the bruised reed. Why, here is a sturdy oak torn by the wind, and here at its root is a daisy none the worse for the roaring tempest: given an oak and a daisy to confront the storm, which will survive? Of course the daisy will be blown away and the oak will stand; a certain kind of unlearned doctrine of probability might lead to that conclusion, but the facts are against it; it is the oak that is torn, it is the daisy that seems rather to have enjoyed the roaring cyclone. Life is full of such contradictions and such mysteries and such perplexities. Natural reason says, I cannot explain these things, but there they are. We cannot terminate the sentence so; there they are, in a certain limited sense no doubt; suppose that a non-religious man has to look at the case; he dismisses ghostly personalities and ghostly ministries, but he is confronted with ghostly circumstances; the law of probability has been set aside, the discoveries of reason and of science have been blown away by some angry mocking wind, and here is left the perplexity, the tumult, the difficulty, the misery. What can you say about it? If you get rid of ghostly personalities you do not get rid of ghostly circumstances. If we leave

what is called natural reason and open the Bible, and ask what that book has to say about all these ghostly circumstances and bewildering wonders, we get a very definite answer.

Concerning that answer I make three submissions. First, that it is adequate. The Bible says, The Lord reigns ; you do not see everything just as it is in its real purpose and its full scope, you are walking in shadows, the colours are all blurred, but wait for the end, for the upsumming of life's mystery by the God of life, and God will justify Himself. There is but one Lord, there is only one enduring throne ; you must not, therefore, judge anything before the time, the hour of judgment has not come, criticism must not yet be invoked, because the whole case is not before us ; wait, wait patiently ; O rest in the Lord. We have in this chapter and in the text great voices which bring with them their own adequacy : — “ I have holden thee ; I will go before thee ; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron ; I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places ; I have even called thee by thy name ; I have surnamed thee ; I have girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.”

I submit, secondly, that the explanation is reasonable. It puts a living Personality at the head of things, it dismisses blind fate and enthrones a living God : no matter if He be invented, there He is ; the imagination that invented fate has but a poor wing compared with the imagination that invented God. It is reasonable to believe that things are governed by an Infinite Intelligence ; it is reasonable to suppose that God, having made this universe, has not discarded it : He who created the universe pledged Himself by that very act to redeem it ; creation and redemption are terms implying one another. It is reasonable to believe that we have not seen the end of things yet ; when the next sentence is added it will be a sentence of light. We simply wait the turning over of the page, the riddle is on one page, and the answer is on the next page, and we should be doing injustice to our own intelligence, we should be

affronting our own education, if we did not wait until the page were turned over and we got the answer to the enigma.

I submit, thirdly, that the explanation is not only adequate and reasonable, but that it is ennobling. All this was worth going through because of the issue ; we are being watched, inspired, guided. Once let that faith get hold of the soul, and that faith will mean Sabbath day, a holy peace, a celestial, unruffled tranquility. We are being educated, moulded, we are being made meet for the Master's service, we are having another faculty added to the sum-total of our present manhood ; we are being refined, purified, chastened. Let some such conception of life get into a man's soul, and instantly everything takes upon itself a new colour and sets itself in a new relation, and dumb despair becomes a trembling song, and the trembling song will one day be a triumphant pæan. I say that is a larger and more satisfactory explanation than has been given to me by any other man or any other book. I heard just now what natural reason had to say, I saw the doctors turn away in simple amazement and bewilderment, and I saw those who had been studying the whole mystery of life from a purely outside point of view give up the riddle ; now that the Bible is opened, and the Biblical speakers begin to address themselves to these points, I see light, a grand possibility awaiting that excites no impatience, I feel an assurance that means that I myself, poor, smitten, desolated creature, will one day be able to say to Him who sat upon the throne, It was well done ; canst Thou add to the miracle by forgiving the impatience that charged Thee with cruelty ? Always remember that we really do not know what we are doing. We remember looks which at the time simply flashed by us, and now they return with significance ; we recall coincidences which at the moment seemed to signify nothing, and now we see they signified providence, purpose, destiny. We do not know why we did this or that, but the time comes when we shall know all about it. What a look was that, what a tone it was that thrilled us, what a seeming chance it was that parted the ways and set us on the right road to

light and heaven! We do not know why we choose our texts, why we adopt this or that line or policy in business, why we are friends with this particular man or that; sometimes we are startled by the irreconcilableness and irony of our own position; we think it is impossible that we can have formed such and such associations; yet there comes a time when we see that a golden thread has been running through the whole. We wondered why we went to a certain place, it was a chance, it was a so-called accident; it was not, it was fore-ordained from the foundation of the world. Do not let us take our lives into our own hands. We may be clever enough to commit suicide, but we are not clever enough to undertake a successful manipulation of that wondrous mystery which we call ourselves. Leave God some room in your soul; do not write out your bill of self-statesmanship so as to leave no line for God; by all means write out your policy and submit it in open pages to the light of heaven, and say, God forbid that I should adopt this programme, flattering and seductive as it is, if God's blessing be not resting upon it. When you are assured of that blessing, proceed; He will find a place for your tent, and He will give the darkness charge concerning you, and He will send through the darkness angel visions which shall be brighter than stars. The great difficulty with man is that he will not follow the advice, the counsel, and the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ told men not to be corrosively anxious, but some of His best suppliants and missionaries do cultivate a certain love of corrosive and cancerous solicitude; they think they must look after their own affairs. Of course if you have committed only a part of your life to God, you must look after the part that you have not committed to God, but if you have committed your way unto the Lord, every inch and every mile of it, do not interfere with it. But we must do something? Certainly. What is that something? Obey: obedience is religion, obedience is triumph. Man must be busy: Jesus Christ says, "Take no thought for to-morrow," and to-morrow is killing most of us; we cannot keep our hands off to-morrow, and yet to-morrow eludes the industry of our most energetic hands. Jesus says,

“Consider the lilies of the field how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Yes, we think that is blank verse; not until we turn that blank verse into discipline can we have rest. My Lord says, Behold the fowls of the air, your heavenly Father keepeth them, and with no storehouse and no barn, not one of them falleth to the ground without your Father: are ye not much better than they? We admit it on paper, but we too are guilty of mental reservation. We are severe with the clergy who subscribe their names and yet reserve some degree of fealty, we call that hypocrisy, we denounce it sometimes with unintelligent anger; let us take care how we throw stones. Have we not subscribed as it were with the very ink of our heart an oath that we would leave ourselves in the hands of God and trust our affairs absolutely to Him? then have we not, having dried our signature in the very sun, gone away and done certain things according to our own notion? It would never do to trust all things to Providence, you say. How do you know it would never do? you have never tried it, and who are you that you should be wise enough to know what would never do if you have never tried it? That is my appeal, that the sword with which I pierce my own unbelieving, rebellious heart; I have never really wholly, absolutely thrown myself upon the Lord’s strong arms; is it, therefore, for me to say that it would never do to bring faith to its proper culmination and final issue? Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief; I know it would be better for me to leave this thing or that alone, but, my God, Thou knowest I am in the land of the devil still, and he is always telling me to do just a little for myself, and he plies me with the fallacy that heaven only helps those who help themselves, and that little infidel proverb seems to haunt me: it stands at my desk when I write, at mine altar when I kneel to pray, it follows me on the high road and into the market-place, it tells me daily its poor lie; teach me that heaven helps those who are first helped by heaven; make way in my poor heart for Thine own inspiration, and give me that quick, auditory nerve which hears Thy going when it is afar

off, and send some radiant child of Thine on some urgent errand to tell me that he who saves his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for Thy sake shall find it; I want to live on Thy proverbs, not on the apothegms of educated lunacy.

PASTORAL WORDS.

EVIL is suicidal. It would seem to be impossible that evil can be immortal, because it continually falls into deepening weakness under its own action. Cancer never leads to health. Evil is moral cancer, and must end in the extinction of strength and of life. It is not necessary that evil should die to-morrow, or in the next generation. God's judgments are always pronounced in the light of great breadths of time.

The important point to be remembered by evil-minded persons is that they are not injuring themselves only. The mischief which they do follows their posterity. The deed which is done to-day may reappear in unhappy effects in the experience of a century hence. Surely there should be some restraining influence arising from this reflection. But how can evil restrain itself? It lives on its own rioting and tumult, and being intensely selfish, it cannot project its imagination into the issues of time.

What is true of evil in the matter of self-destruction is true of good in the matter of self-propagation. All good is rooted in God. The eternity of God therefore is the guarantee of the immortality of goodness. It is of the quality of God Himself. Goodness therefore cannot die. The lamp of the wicked shall be blown out, but the seed of the righteous shall go on from strength to strength evermore.

Though there is a hereditary law in the matter both of evil and of good, it must not be understood that a man is hopelessly condemned because his ancestors were evil, or that a man is necessarily saved because his ancestors were good. The general law may be modified by particular instances. If any man, looking over a long list of progenitors, cannot find a good name amongst them, that is no reason why he himself should not repent and pray.

[*Thursday Morning, 16th March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come to Thee to ask that we may receive by Thine infinite grace the spirit of filial obedience. Thou canst work this miracle in our hearts ; take away from us our own will, and in its place do Thou establish the will of God ; may we be enabled to say at all times, Not my will, but Thine be done ; may we by diligently searching find out what is Thy will, and by simple trust do Thy will with our whole heart most lovingly. This prayer Thou hast taught us by Thy Spirit, this is no desire of our own ; for we have followed our own will and satisfied our own desire, and have been content with such mean satisfaction : now we feel the power of Thy grace, we respond to the call of heaven, we renounce ourselves, we deny ourselves utterly, and take upon us Thy will and Thy good pleasure ; but this we can do only by the infinite energy of the Holy Ghost. Wherein we struggle to do Thy will Thou wilt graciously assist us, wherein we fail to do it Thou wilt not crush us with Thy great power. Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust, Thou wilt not quench the smoking flax, Thou wilt not break the bruised reed ; if, therefore, we lovingly and faithfully attempt to do Thy will Thou wilt make Thy grace perfect in our weakness, yea, Thou wilt turn our weakness into an element of strength. The Lord help us to take upon our souls this day the whole burden of His gracious law ; this we would do in the name of Christ and whilst we tarry at the foot of the Cross. To that Cross we would nail our own will, and at that Cross we would take upon us the gracious, glorious will of Christ. Amen.

LEVITICUS OLD AND NEW.

"What doth the Lord require of thee?"—MICAH vi. 8.



IF we could know that, we need not desire to know any more. Our life is best spent when spent in asking, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? We are not to consult ourselves, but to consult God; the law is written; it is not a conjecture, it is a statutory declaration, and it is to be found in the law-book: to the law and to the testimony, therefore, and to no supposition, fancy, or conjecture of mortal man. Where can we find out what God requires of us? If we could find that out in simple language, simple as our mother tongue, familiar as the customs of the day in which we live, what need should we have respecting further knowledge? None whatever: if the will of God is knowable there is no richer treasure, there is no completer law for life. But can the will of God be known? Christians say, most certainly the will of God can be known, and is made known in the pages of Holy Writ and in the consciousness of spiritualised humanity. But how can we be perfectly sure that it is the will of God? By doing it; there is no other way; this puts an end to all your controversy and fancying and all your clever and dexterous movements in so-called but mis-called and futile logic. Let us remember that, let us write it upon our hearts; to have heard that declaration is to have incurred a new responsibility in life: we have heard it, it has just been made known to us, that the only way to know whether it is God's will is to do it. That is a practical test, and it is a final test, and it is a rational test, and there is no escape from it. If we begin to talk about the will of God and to fancy what the will of God might be, ought to be, must be, we shall be lost in a cloud of words, we shall be going astray in a

wilderness of vanity ; but take up any of the Divine precepts or any of the precepts supposed to be Divine, and carry out any one of those precepts, and the result will prove the divinity of the precept we have endeavoured to obey. Christianity is a discipline, Christianity is a revelation of conduct, Christianity is manners, social refinement, noblest gentleness, highest courtesy, and it is beyond all that a great revelation of light to the soul, a new lesson in the metaphysic of things, the inmost soul and spirit of the Divine meaning.

Where can we begin ? God has given us a thousand points at any one of which we can begin. We might, first of all, think it impossible to know the will of God, because it would be so stupendous, that is to say, so comprehensive, so vast, and so overwhelming, that it would be utterly impossible for the finite imagination to conceive what God intends us to do. The Lord delivers us from that difficulty ; He has written down His will in little words, He has come right into our daily life and told us how to manage ourselves, and how to conduct the economy of life. He does not always talk theology to us, He talks about daily things in our mother tongue, and says in effect, You may begin there. And wherever we can begin God begins along with us, hears us spell a little lesson, tells us just the quantity of the syllable, the measure of the rhythmic foot, and repronounces the music to us in order to make us sure of its accent and its balance. It is an education to read with God ; the Almighty allows us in the first instance to stumble over the words and to struggle through the rhythm with our poor ideas of scansion and measure and tone ; then the Lord Himself takes up the revelation or the parable or the history, as the case may be, and in His own tone reads to us the music which we have made so rough and so difficult. The point is that we can begin at a thousand different lessons—that is to say, we can begin with any one of a thousand different lessons ; we may not all be at the same point of instruction or inquiry, but we may all be in the same school and under the same Tutor, and we are not at liberty to sneer at one another because one man is further on and another man is struggling laboriously after him. What doth the Lord thy God require of thee ? That is what I

want to know. Oh, tell me that, and I am a wise man, and I have passed all the philosophies of time and entered into the wisdom of eternity. But eternity is so vast and incomprehensible. I hear you moan that objection, and in a certain sense and degree you are perfectly right. Therefore the Lord comes down into the narrow sphere of time and says, Let us leave eternity out of the question for a moment, and see what time is, and what can be done within the narrow compass of this poor life's fleeting duration. That is the condescension of God; He would meet us more than half-way; He does not stand up on some mountain-peak in the clouds and shout to us to come up through the fog and the darkness to do deeds beyond our strength; He comes down from all the mountains of eternity and meets us at the base of the hill, and says, Little children, I will speak your language until you are able to speak Mine. Now let us hear Him, and learn the meaning of these holy words.

We have a field. We all know what a field is. The Lord says, Let us begin in the field. Lord, we should be thankful to begin in the field-school, what hast Thou to say about our narrow acres and our recurring harvests? And He will make us this gracious reply: "When you reap the harvest of your land thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger." You can understand that? Yes. There is nothing subtle and metaphysical about that? Nothing. You cannot escape that Divine pressure under the plea that it is unknowable and beyond the fancy and the grasp of the reason of man. No. Then God says, Let us begin there; when you reap the harvest of your land leave something for the poor and the stranger. Here is God in His most humble guise; the language seems to be so homely and so commonplace in a certain sense that we cannot believe that it is the eternal and incomprehensible Jehovah who is speaking. Do not try to ride off on that false pretence; God can speak in monosyllables, God can come into the market-place and talk the language of the counter; God is the original agriculturist; He who gives the harvest says, Give away part of it; nay, do better

than give it away, leave it that the people may come and fetch it, and by their gleaning and labouring give them somewhat of a subtle sense that they have actually worked for the very harvest which you have left behind for their gathering. What subtle music! what meanings within meanings! what revelations of love! Any man who has been trying to ride off on the plea that theology is metaphysical and transcendental is called back; I call upon him to halt, and do this commandment of God. That will test his sincerity. He has all the while been infidelizing among his friends as if he would be the most pious of men if he could only comprehend God and enter into the invisible sanctuary and be familiar with the angels. Stop! "What do you want me to do?" To begin in the harvest-field, and not to be a blatant but almost transparent hypocrite. We do not ask you in the Church to be a transcendentalist, we ask you to be humane, considerate, large enough of heart to take in the poor and the stranger. That does not suit my lord the hypocrite.

Suppose that we have no harvest-field, then of course the Lord will have nothing for us to do; not having a harvest-field, we instantly agree with this doctrine; for man is always ready to part with anything that belongs to some other man; there he is almost an angel in generosity. Not having a harvest-field, he is perfectly willing that other people should leave the corner of the fields to be gleaned and reaped by the poor and the stranger, and he admires the economy because the part of the field that was to be reserved for the poor and the stranger was at the end of the field, and the part most accessible; there was to be no difficulty put in the way of the poor or the stranger; the part where the gleaning was to be done was nearest at hand. The man who has no harvest-field admires it; he sees it in a flash of the finest statesmanship and liberality; not having a harvest-field, he approves the statutory declaration and urges the administrators of the temple law to see to it that the farmers of the country keep the legislation. I call upon that man also to stop; let him hear the further word of God; he may be caught, let him listen: "And ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely,

neither lie to one another." That is bringing the law down to a vast area of common human life; these instructions or injunctions seem to touch everybody. "Ye shall not steal." That is the great crime of every age. Stealing needs to be defined: there is stealing inside the Church and outside the Church; to a very large extent the market-place lives by theft; London or any other great city is a hotbed of thievery. Stealing is not always the vulgar crime which can be recognised and punished by the magistrate; we steal time, we steal reputations, we steal from one another without putting out our hands in any overt act; dishonesty is theft, unpunctuality is theft, saying one thing and meaning another is theft as well as falsehood. We cannot break one law without breaking ten; he who is guilty of the least breach is guilty of the overthrowing of the entire structure of moral law. "Neither shall ye deal falsely, neither lie one to another." We could begin there; the man who left the Church because he thought the Church was set apart to the bewildering consideration of immeasurable subjects will soon find himself wrong. The person who imagined that churches were built to talk about the essentially mysterious, the eternal and the incomprehensible, will soon find that no man can talk wisely about eternity who does not bring it down to bear upon every event and circumstance and obligation of time. When men object to the Bible probably some of them object to it because they do not like to retain its morality in their hearts. Given a Jehovah, an unpronounceable name, a great Hebrew cloud, and many a trickster will endeavour to evade his obligations in that direction; but given a Sinai, whose business is in every house, and a law which says, No stealing, no lying, no false witness, who could tolerate a religion so exacting? Then we begin to ask questions about eternity and the origin of evil and the duration of penalty, and we betake ourselves with intellectual eagerness to the discussion of purely speculative questions. Stop! "What?" Thou shalt not steal, thou speculative dreamer, thou who dost expect to escape the judgment of God by talking about the mysteries of God; stop! thou shalt not steal. Some men have thought that religion was aerial, nubial, transcendental, remote, far beyond all human imagin-

ing ; stop ! thou shalt not steal. If you bravely struggle to keep that commandment God Himself will draw nigh and read it to you and explain it to you, and by endeavouring honestly not to steal you may gradually get into the very spirit and genius of honesty. What I want you to feel is this, that you must not ride off on some lofty white cloud of fancy or dream, but you must come right down to the moral bases of the Bible and stop there until you are prepared to rise into the sublimest heights of spiritual transcendentalism and divinest communion with the invisible God.

What doth the Lord thy God require of thee ? If I could know that I should know all philosophy. You may know it, you may know it at least in parts, and you may proceed from one part to another. Revelation is progressive ; moral education adds to itself increment by increment until the final topstone is put on with the acclaim of the universe. I could tell you where you could begin : "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind." Is that religion ? Yes ; you thought religion was talking an unknown language, but the mistake is yours, not the Bible's ; you thought that religion was an act of clasping hands and turning up eyes into the immeasurable heavens and speaking into an infinite void in the hope of getting some blessing out of it. Nothing of the kind : "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block in the way of the blind." You could do that, instead of running off upon speculative questions as to the Trinity, as to the constitution of the Godhead, as to the metaphysics of prayer ; you could stop at the base of the great moral structure which God has built, and you could begin there, and gradually ascend until from higher heights you behold wider horizons. Do not mock the deaf, he cannot hear you ; do not vent your rage and think it innocent so to do because the man does not hear the violence of your language. The further and implied Hebrew meaning of the word is, Thou shalt not curse the absent, and therefore by so much the deaf—that is to say, by so much deaf, because the absent cannot hear you ; you shall not be slanderers, you shall not be critics of those who cannot speak to you for themselves ; you shall not make anonymous attacks upon the absent and the deaf

or those who are known by reputation ; you shall not hide yourselves behind a hedge and sling stones at those who are walking in the open highway. Is that religion ? Yes. I do not wonder that some men give up religion ; it must be burdensome to some. There is no yoke so heavy as Christ's when unwillingly borne, none so light when borne with the consent and adoration of love ; that is the difference between a heavy burden and a light one.

Here we come again upon the man who thought that if he went to hear a sermon he would hear something about the infinite, the absolute, the incomprehensible, the unrelated, the metaphysical, the incalculable. How foolish a man is that ! There is no church worth maintaining that does not thunder out the commandments and that does not declare the law. The law is not disestablished by grace ; by grace it is interpreted and glorified and made easy—easy because it no longer appeals to the servile spirit, but to the filial spirit of love.

We are now being taught more and more by this question, What doth the Lord thy God require of thee ? But there may be persons who say they do not steal, they may steal, though they deny it ; there may be persons who say they are always considerate of the deaf and the blind and the absent : they may think so in the very act of their guilt. But even they have a little commandment addressed to themselves : "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." Then where is Society ? Nowhere ; broken up, burned, a scorched and blasted thing, running from the presence of God. We thought the church was a place to receive lulling and soothing and comforting ; we thought if we went to church we should receive a benediction. You are perfectly right ; there is no place like the church for comfort and for benediction after a certain destructive process. The kingdom of God is first pure, then peaceable ; man must repent before he can receive peace. God does not plaster the impenitent heart with the plaster of a false peace ; He says we must get rid of this cancer, sin ; it must be eradicated by the Divine surgery, and having got that out, every fibre and every filament out, and thrown into the fire,

then will begin the constructive and healing process, and then the church will be one gracious, sabbatic, infinite benediction. "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." Why, that would close the occupation of many people, they would simply have nothing to do; especially if they read the exact Hebrew meaning of the word, Thou shalt not be a pedlar of tales, thou shalt not be a packman having in thy pack a heavy burden of gossip and stories and tales about the man who lives on the right-hand and the woman who lives two streets off, and the family whose name you will not mention; thou shalt not be a little mean pedlar, going up and down among the people doing mischief and saying you did not mean it—only asking questions. Oh, the mischief of it, and the misery! Only asking questions! when you are thrusting daggers. Do you wonder that some people give up the church, and turn aside from the Bible, and renounce worship, and prefer Sunday amusements to Bible-reading? I do not. The Word of God is keen, sharp, more like a two-edged sword than anything else, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. What wonder if men should give up religion and take to blasphemy?

Ah! quoth the shopkeeper, I have no field. I have no harvest; all these things refer to other people. I stop him and say, If you are a shopkeeper the law comes into your shop and speaks to you in your own language. What, do you mean to say that the legislation of Moses comes into my shop? It does, both when you are there and when you are not there. "Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just bin shall ye have." Beginning with the agricultural gentlemen of the country, the law comes down to the shopkeeper and says, "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in meteyard, in weight, or in measure." This is the Book that the working-classes too much despise; this is the Book on which men have turned their backs, when it has been endeavouring to plead their cause and to urge their claims; the Book has been cruelly, unjustly used; if men would reform their country, they should read the Bible and apply it; the country needs no other reformation. Surely the time will come when men will read the Bible.

But this was all said by Moses, there is nothing of the kind said by Jesus Christ, some persons may insinuate. But they are utterly wrong in their sophistical if not their ignorant and criminal suggestion. Jesus Christ said every one of these things in His own way; He did not destroy the law, He fulfilled it; the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, and grace and truth are law at its best, law in blossom and in autumnal fruition. Jesus Christ also put in a plea for the poor; He told certain men who were great at supper-giving that they had better reform their manners, and He gave them a list of guests. He said, Call the halt and the poor and the blind and the lame, they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just; thou knowest the commandments, keep these. He reduced the commandments to two in number without taking away the force or moral quality of any of the remainder. The Sermon on the Mount is the new Leviticus; the Sermon on the Mount is the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus written or spoken in Christian language. No man can fulfil the moral obligation imposed upon him by the Sermon on the Mount without repeating in solid visible conduct the whole Decalogue as written by Moses. We must, therefore, again and again insist upon the moral quality of the Gospel; that is to say, upon the moral meaning of the most abstract doctrines. We read these injunctions amiss if we omit the grand religious words which connect them, "I am the Lord." This occurs more than once in the giving of the expanded Decalogue; so that these are not mere maxims, happy apothegms, which might have been invented by a Seneca, they are maxims with an eternity behind them, they are apothegms that express the last result of the thinking and purpose of the Divine mind. These injunctions cannot be satisfied by mere assent. Assent is not a religion, the grammar of assent is not a revelation of an obedient heart. Many men admire the Bible who do not practise it; many persons are prepared to say the Levitical law was simply beautiful in its ethical conceptions and in its ethical injunctions. No Gospel is satisfied with admiration; the true Gospel of Christ can only be satisfied by adoption, assimilation, incarnation, reproduction. Many persons are

prepared to read certain portions of the Koran and to say, These are very beautiful indeed; others read portions of the Vedas and say, What admirable poetry, and what subtle philosophy, and no more comes of it. The Gospel is not satisfied by such reading; it must be received, accepted, adopted, believed by the whole consenting heart, and carried out by an energetic and spiritual will. Do you wonder at men leaving the church? The church must be a hard place for some persons to attend. And if any class of preachers is ever about to arise that will give the bad man an easy time in church, I hope God will burn their pulpit.

[*Thursday Morning, 23rd March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

WE worship Thee as the God of salvation. When there was no eye to pity and no arm to save, Thine eye pitied and Thine arm wrought out for us a mighty and final redemption. We have come to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel ; we have come to the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness ; we have heard to our heart's great joy that the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin : each would now cry from the depths of his penitential heart, God be merciful unto me a sinner ! We have sinned personally, and personally we would confess our sins and seek the forgiveness of God. We rejoice that pardon comes to us through the priesthood of Jesus Christ and by faith that is in Him : Lord, increase our faith, that our consciousness of personal pardon may be daily deepened. We would repent of the past and forsake it, we would have no more memory of sin, so richly would we have the presence of Christ and the assurance of His saving love. We are prodigals, but Thou art our Father ; we have gone far afield seeking our own welfare, and behold, we have returned to Thee, confessing our sin and our shame, and asking Thee at the foot of the Cross to pity us, to have mercy upon us, and to give us the seal of Thy pardoning love. Enable us to read Thy Word aright, may we know the meaning of the coming of Christ ; with the dear Saviour may we always associate the great idea of salvation : thus may we have joy in Him, a deep personal tender joy, a sense as of sin forgiven and pardon assured sevenfold. Let the spirit of the kind heavens descend upon us, give us to feel Thy nearness, and the nearness of Jesus Christ, and the nearness of the Holy Ghost, whom we worship and adore and would serve as one God. Amen.

MISUSED PRECEDENTS.

"As Elias did."—LUKE ix. 54.

ELIAS is a New Testament name for the Elijah of the Old Testament. Elijah was a prophet of fire and vengeance and doom, a most austere and terrible man, well fitted for his time, speaking the word of the Lord directly and with memorable effect. Once he called down fire, once he called out bears from the wood to devour those who insulted him; he handled the great ministries of vengeance and resentment like an expert. The poor disciples who had been rejected in the village referred to in the text, a village of the Samaritans, thought they might do something in the way of fire; they besought the Lord saying, "Wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" Take care how you play at being Elias! Only an Elias can do what Elias did. We are not all Elijahs. Fire is a dangerous thing even when handled by the most noble and powerful of the prophets; fire would very likely consume us if we attempted to use it in the destruction of other people. What a tendency there is to quote history just as it may happen to suit our purpose at the time! How we love the men who preach our sermons! How we dote upon the historic personages who say things which exactly suit our temper and conform to our prejudices and give an outlet to our judgments and resentments! We make men great that we may hide ourselves behind them. What a comfort to the uneasy conscience that the name of a great man can be quoted as giving somewhat of patronage and consent, however small and reluctant, to anything which we have felt it to be our duty to do! This is characteristic of human life, this is notably characteristic of religious life; we do not look at the man in his

totality, but at some little odd incident which marked his life or some peculiar phrase which was distinctive of his speech, and if we can use either of these to our own advantage we are willing to choose some emblematic flower by which to commemorate his name and memory.

We may, I think, edify ourselves by bringing together a few thoughts under the general title of Misused Precedents. Many people would almost die for a precedent; they may not thoroughly understand what a precedent involves in all its applications, but their instinct of order and traditional decency is so great that they would almost cut off a right hand in order to support a precedent, especially in the degree in which they do not understand either the precedent or its application. What would the world be without precedents? What did they do in the olden time? What has been the custom of this society? If you were to move anything novel in that particular organisation which is now present to the consciousness of your memory, some very small man not more than five feet high would rise in a distant corner of the room and inquire of the presiding officer what the precedent is upon this matter. The disciples thought they had a good precedent to rely upon; it never could have occurred to their infertile and non-enterprising minds to cut their way through difficulty and opposition by fire, but they suddenly remembered that once Elias called down fire from heaven, and as he was not present at that particular time they did not see why they should not be Elias by proxy. They mentioned the matter to the Saviour, and—He burned them, He called down fire upon their suggestion, He condemned them as misrepresenting the precedents of history, the great emblems and types of the Divine dispensations in their mysterious and beneficent evolution. We may in some degree excuse these inexperienced disciples; it was not so long ago that they had seen Elias; quite a little time since they were on the mountain-top where they saw Moses and Elias, and almost heard them in conference with Christ concerning the exodus which He accomplished at Jerusalem: thus history was fresh in their recollection; this was not a far-fetched suggestion on the part of the disciples, they had recently

come down from Tabor, and having once seen Elijah no man could ever forget him; they suddenly remembered that Elias used the argument of fire, the hot persuasion of flame, and they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we repeat the example of the immortal prophet whose effigy we have just seen in the mountain-cloud? And Jesus turned and rebuked them and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: we are not under the Old Testament, we are writing the New Testament, the better Testament; the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Salvation is infinitely greater than destruction: the cattle crush the flower in the field as they browse upon the green grass, but no ox can set up again the flower which he has crushed in the meadow.

We are caught in the same condemnation with these disciples; we do the very self-same thing they did. Shall we not enjoy life's wildest gaiety—as Solomon did? There we bring in a little bit of Bible to cover a great deal of worldliness. Man is proud to be able to attach a Biblical label to the bottle which contains the poison for which his passions pant. Solomon was gay, and Solomon was a Biblical character; Solomon built great houses, inhabited the noblest palaces, was higher than any king that had ever reigned; his throne of ivory, his throne of gold, his menservants and womenservants, and his delight in musical instruments and that of all sorts, his gardens and his fountains and his revelries and his festivities; shall we not take some little part at least in the world's flash and gaiety, as Solomon did? Why do you not quote the whole of Solomon's example? why do you pick out the little pieces in his life that exactly suit your momentary desires? Was he not wise above all men? did he not desire the understanding or the Lord to be given to him? did he not excel in wisdom as well as in festivity and frivolous enjoyment? Why not quote the whole man? If you want to do what Solomon did you must first go in at the temple gate and be worthy of the temple dignity and genius, and you must little by little sin your way down to Solomon's degradation. I charge you to beware how you mistake or misapply the precedents of human history.

Shall we not tell lies and make our way easy in life, getting out of its difficulties and perplexities by the shortest possible method, that is, by telling downright blackest lies—as Abram did? There is your little Biblical text again; these three words so misapplied will be your ruin; you do not study the whole Abramic character. Abram had his grand qualities, he did not always lie, even kings rebuked him and set him at an infinite disadvantage once or twice, but, taking the sum total of his character, he was eminent above many for intelligent and obedient piety. He left his father's house and his father's land, and he went a-journeying under the impulse of a great Divine suggestion, not knowing whither he went; he was faithful according to his light on ninety-nine occasions out of a hundred; why should we take out the little or great faults of noble men, quote these in justification of our own defaults, and forget the substance and the average of the characters which we thus undervalue and affront?

Shall we not run away from the Nineveh of strenuous effort and disagreeable occupation and flee to the Tarshish of self-indulgence and quietude—as Jonah did? So you are ready with your Biblical reference again; you have always that little piece of Biblical history to refer to, you can always make a man very great in order that you may use him as a cover or a defence in the time of cowardice and sin. Jonah did run away from Nineveh, Jonah did shirk his duty, but he did not shirk his duty in order to create a precedent for us to do the same; remember his punishment, remember the judgments of the Lord that fell upon him, remember that in the long run he did go to Nineveh and proclaim the doom of the city; do quote the whole instance; do not falsify history by quoting only part of it.

Shall we not deny the Lord and say we never heard of Him—as Peter did? If this Bible had concealed the faults of its saints it would have cut off from us the power of using such precedents to our shame and to our confusion; but the Bible details the whole character, gives a complete and vivid portraiture of its noblest saints and characters, and we

have fallen to such moral degradation that we quote the faults and forget the excellencies. Peter did deny his Lord, but he went out and wept bitterly; Peter did profane the holy Name, but he had an interview with the Lord on the lonely seashore, and there he said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee"; Peter did play the coward, but he was crucified upside down.

What, then, is the lesson? Not to quote the shortcoming as a defence of our own deficiencies, but to look at the sum total of the character and to endeavour to emulate it according to our ability and opportunity.

I have the greatest difficulty in joining people in celebrating great names. Many commemorations of a demonstrative and turbulently noisy kind I cannot join in, I refrain from associating myself with them because they do not correctly represent the men whom they are intended to honour. Some time ago we had a great commemoration of Martin Luther; in some respects it was a farce and a national degradation; the people who commemorated him and waved red banners and blew loud trumpets would in some cases have expelled from the Church of to-day the very man whose name they rapturously and ignorantly applauded. They did not study the whole Luther. There is no room for Luther in any of our modern assemblies; there is room for part of Luther, for certain great, heroic, and noble qualities of Luther, but taking the man Luther as a whole, he would be scorned by many of the men whose unclean hands were clapped as a kind of national and international hosanna to a memory which was not grasped in its entirety or understood in its whole genius. What room would there be for a man who called the Epistle of James an Epistle of straw? How could we receive into our assemblies a man who called Calvin a beast? What sympathy would many of us have with a man who spent his Sunday afternoons in smoking his pipe, drinking his beer, and entering into many of the social enjoyments of his native land? Such a man would not be welcomed by many who profess to be the intensest Protestants of the day. We thus abuse history by not understanding it; we say "as Luther did" just as it may happen

to suit our purpose at the time. Luther was too big for many of us; there is room for only three on this seat, and Luther takes up the room of six. But it is pleasant at a distance of three hundred years to shout hozanna in memory of Luther, the Luther that would have overpowered us by his individuality, his characteristics, his specialties, his peculiar prejudices, as well as dazzled us by the splendour of his genius and the abundance of his resources. Quote the whole man, or let him alone.

Shal. we not kill kings—as Cromwell did? There is the same fault that is made so vivid in the context which we are now considering. Cromwell did not kill kings, Cromwell had no enmity to kings, Cromwell upheld righteousness. And if in upholding righteousness he had to kill a king, he killed him. You misunderstand the man if you suppose that he had any personal enmity to king as king; his whole soul was concerned in the doing of justice, in the progress of humanity, in the glory of God, and if in pursuing and accomplishing these sublime objects he had to discharge an awful and an appalling duty he did not shrink from the terrible task that was laid upon him. Do not you play at killing kings, and do not shout, when the police are five hundred yards away or five hundred miles, “Down with the king!” It is not brave, it is a poor heroism; I saw you look over your shoulder to see where the constable was before you joined in the outcry—shameful, contemptible cowardice, which no king would fear and no honest man for a moment either espouse or respect.

Shall we not burn heretics—as Calvin did? There is your same old fault, you see; I cannot get you away from the misuse of precedents. You take up one little corner of a great man’s life, and forget the ninety-nine-hundredths which would go totally against your conception of his character. It is a base use of history, it is in this way that history is degraded, and deconsecrated, and turned into a peculiar blasphemy.

When is history used immorally? When it is torn out of its proper setting, when we seize upon a

solitary anecdote and forget the great context of the character ; when history is used for merely private and selfish purposes ; then history is degraded and demoralised, when the incident which we quote is magnified above the philosophy which we ignore. So many men live in the external, the outward, and the evanescent ; so many persons are fond of an incident who do not want the reason which underlies the whole character ; so many can remember an anecdote when they forget the argument. It is the curse of preaching ! Some little apparently insignificant point is remembered, but the philosophical conception and spiritual purport of the discourse may be utterly overlooked or despised.

In many things we ourselves see and acknowledge the truthfulness of the criticisms which have been thus passed upon the partial use of historical precedents. Where is there a man who would say, Lord, let it please Thee to enable me to lurch and halt and twist my limbs as Byron did ? Not a man ; but that is exactly what so many of us do when we quote historical personages, when we quote the limp and forget the poetry. When Cromwell was going to have his portrait painted the painter was anxious that he should turn the side of his face which concealed a very prominent wart. "No," said Oliver, "paint me, wart and all." That is a commentary upon the text : we enlarge the wart, or conceal it, or deny it ; we cannot be fair to history. Where is there a preacher who would say, Lord, make my eyes cross and squint as Whitefield's did, as Edward Irving's did ? Many persons can imitate the squint who cannot imitate the eloquence. Beware how you run away with another man's gun unless you take his bullet also. I repeat, only an Elias can do as Elias did. Where is there a man who would covet Beethoven's deafness and forget to pray for the genius of his music ? And is it right to quote the damnable example of Iscariot without remembering that he went out and hanged himself ? We should be just even to the memory of Iscariot. Do not pick out the little incidents which it suits us to comment upon, but take the whole character and judge it in its totality. And that is exactly what we want to do with the Christian religion. Quote it all or quote none. We

quote the infirmities of professors and forget the holiness of the law; if we can only seize a Christian professor in the act of breaking some great law we think we have destroyed the Christian argument; we cannot tell what that man has been going through; you would take a very different view of his conduct even, if you understood the temptations, difficulties, trials, and manifold fires through which his soul has passed. It is easy to condemn, but remember you are the servants of the Son of man, who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. It requires a Christian to see in a sinner anything worth saving.

The same principle applies to the use of favourite passages. Many persons have their pet texts; many Bibles are only marked occasionally; the soul has a tendency to love certain Scriptures which give it the least possible trouble and promise it the greatest possible advantages, and the soul feeds upon such passages and considers itself edified. That soul is guilty of suicide, that soul is over-dosing itself with luxuries, and no good can come of it. The law that saith, Thou shalt not steal, saith also, Oh these cruel men who remember parallel and completing passages! I have no wish to steal; I rejoice when I find that a thief has been committed to a month's imprisonment with hard labour, and I mentally say, The harder the better, because, I say, the law written in the Bible requires thou shalt not steal; and this cruel apostle, who knows more about the law than I do, says to me in a thrilling voice that goes through my very soul, The law that said, Thou shalt not steal, said also, Thou shalt not covet. There I may be a sinner above many; not having stolen anything that can be brought under magisterial criticism, I may suppose myself to be free of the law, but there is a higher law which says, Hast thou coveted? thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not covet anything that is another man's. Who can stand before the fire of God? He does not burn us with hot cinders, He burns us with righteous and terrible judgments.

We commit precisely the same sin by selecting special virtues. That is a dreadful experience. A man will choose virtues which do not touch the weak-

ness and the meanness of his character. It is nothing to some men to be total abstainers from intoxicating drinks; they do not like drinks that are intoxicating, they distinctly revolt from the use of such liquor, they do not know what it is to have the liquor fiend burning or gnawing or tormenting within them; to such people it is not a virtue to be a total abstainer, their total abstinence costs them nothing. But a man sitting next them may have had to fight seven devils of temptation before he could keep his hands off the liquid fire and distilled damnation. He who under such circumstances is a total abstainer is a man of virtue, a manly man, a soldier of God. The poet well says that you may know what sins have been committed, but you know not what sins have been resisted; that was the testimony of Robert Burns, a man who knew the tragedy, the terrible aspects and phases of life. You know not what's resisted, but God knows, and God is judge, and it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. He knows what sore temptations mean, He knows our frame; and as for the dear Son of God, He is not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. To have His heart to run to in time of difficulty, to have His great healing breast to rest our heads upon in the time of sore trial—that is salvation, that is an assured heaven. May the Lord give us understanding of these things that we may be just to history, just to Christianity, and just to the Lord who died for us that our sins may be forgiven.

[*Sunday Morning, 26th March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

HOW long, O Lord, how long? Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! The earth waiteth for Thee; she is redeemed by Thy blood, and would be sanctified by Thy Spirit. Thou hast made oftentimes the day as the night, and the night Thou hast made sevenfold in darkness, and Thy Church has wondered if her God be dead. Lord, restore our faith; call back the attribute and the force which bind us to Thy throne and to Thyself, lest our faith should perish of weariness and the lamp of our hope should go out. Thou knowest what we are and what we can bear and what is good for us; may we acquiesce in Thy will; by faith and by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ may we have no will of our own, but live and move and have our being in God. But the body, the time, the cruel space, the vigilant enemy, who can stand against these? Now and again Thou dost enable us to say, They that be for us are more than all that can be against us; sometimes Thou dost make us strong enough to raise the red banner of victory and float it in the face of the enemy. We want occasional days of broad sunshine, we need once a week a full shining of Thy glory; we have heard of a light above the brightness of the sun; Lord, do Thou now and then pale away this little fire of the sun and replace it by the shining of Thine own face. We have always to thank Thee for Thy love; the manifoldness of Thy care, who can tell it in sufficient words? Behold, Thou dost make our bed in our affliction, Thou dost come into our chambers of sickness as silently as the light comes. Thou dost whisper to the heart when the heart can hear no other voice; Thy promises are exceeding great and precious, never so great and so precious as when we need them most; we hardly cry, Is there no balm in Gilead? until the Physician Himself comes to us and gives us healing and lifting up of life. We bless Thee for a house which is called by Thine own name; there are other houses into which we cannot enter with satisfaction, houses of evil, houses of infamy, houses where the air is laden with doubt, and there is no joy even in the sunshine that struggles into them; but in Thine house is pleasure for evermore; we love the holy psalm, the word written in light; we rejoice to hear the message that comes from the eternal Son of God, a message of love and tenderness and redeeming health. May we enjoy high festival to-day, may we see Jesus at the feast; if He is about to die, He is about also to rise again; we will not think of the solitary Friday, but of the succeeding Sunday, we will unite the days and speak of Easter as a common

joy. Thou knowest what we need now ; faith is going out of some hearts, it is quickly dying because it sees no fulfilment of itself, but all things continue as they were ; sometimes the sky is so leaden, the air so frosty, the whole environment so bitter and hostile, that the soul cannot live, it perishes in the groaning of its own mortality. Then again Thou dost arise with healing under Thy wings, Thou dost come as a great morning glory, an infinite angel, a shining presence paling the sun and making the summer look poor and cold. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly ! If they hear of our woe in Gath, they will mock the altars of Jehovah ; if they hear of our broken-heartedness in Askelon, the daughters of Philistia will rejoice and magnify themselves against us. Oh that we might exemplify Thy grace, be enabled to show in the new manhood and in the tenderer spirit that there is a mystery of grace, a wonder-working power always busy in the education and culture of our hearts. Pity the broken flowers ; pity those who have none to pity them, those who are in the big orphanage, stripped and wounded and utterly poor. Oh, how mean this life is when its central joy is killed ! Thou knowest the brevity of our time, help us to hide our few years in the tranquillity of the eternal God. A thousand ages in Thy sight are like an evening gone, short as the watch that ends the night before the rising dawn. Amen.

CLXXXVII.

THE APPOINTED TIME.

"When the time was come."—LUKE ix 51.



S not every time alike ? Is there a ripening ministry proceeding in nature and in the affairs of men ? Is there any poetry in the clock ? May we not strike our own hours ? What is the meaning of this continual allusion to punctual moments, points of time, the analysis of hours, the waiting, the watching, the flying, the word of command as to time and arrangement ? Can we not do things just when we like ? Certainly not. Why not ? Because we are not atheists. There is a providence of moments ; everything is settled, defined, delimited, and is to be known at the

altar. We are impatient because we are small; the humming-top goes round sooner than the sun. There is a religion of magnitude; the velocity of every planet is determined and the fall of every sere leaf is known; not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father. Is this the teaching of Jesus Christ? This is pre-eminently the doctrine which Jesus Christ laid down and upon which Jesus Christ acted; He did nothing roughly—he moved step by step according to the footfall of the Divine going. “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.” Is there a coming of hours? are there jubilee days and victory moments? has the summer a birth-time? is she calendared and scheduled among the expected and certain visitors? does she come regularly? is there a punctual moment in which summer, the daughter of the skies, is born? “Mine hour is not yet come.” But you are here. Yes. You are the Son of God? Yes. You have come up from eternity to do a certain work in time? Yes. Then why not work this miracle now? Because Mine hour is not yet come. Was He watching for the hour? Did He keep a clock within the clock? is there a time within time, a subtle, peculiar, profound, significant, religious involution only to be got at by patient prayer and inextinguishable hope? Surely we thought our time was our own. Not a moment of it! you know it, and in a certain rough way you occasionally act upon it, as will be presently seen. The disciples were impatient, the Lord was tranquil; the people all round about Him said in effect, Why does He not declare Himself? why does He not work the consummating miracle? why does He put us all to this strain of doubt and fear and troubled expectation? He read their thoughts and said, Your time is alway ready; you work within such a small compass, your energy is spent upon the surface of things; you know nothing about the religion of eternity and of relation and proportion and perspective; you make watches, not suns; you arrange for certain things to be done in hours, you do not use the calculus of eternity; you can order a ladder to be ready in three days, but you cannot order a tree to be ready with the same promptitude; My time is not yet come, your time is alway ready; you do not distinguish between fluttering and flying, you do not

know the bigness of things, you have nothing to do and therefore you can do it any moment; if you lived in the bosom of God and caught the ticking of the pulsation of His heart you would have no standard of time: oh fools! your time is alway ready; you can blow your bubble now, but it is but a bubble. Men who live and die for the ages cannot be hurried; there is no need for urgency and atheistic upset of soul; the great is always calm: the storm is only on the wave, not miles down in the heart and soul of the waters.

And Jesus said, "Father, the hour is come." Do you recognise this? The same voice of patience; it has lost its reproving accent. "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come": a whispered rebuke, a censure amid the wedding favours and confectioneries and wines; then years after, "Father, the hour is come"—just come, it came a moment ago—"now glorify Thy Son." Why not three years before, or thirty? The hour was not then come; now that the hour has come, let the glory flow. I would enter gratefully and reasonably into these mysteries of the economy and providence of time that I may chide myself with many a cutting rebuke for impatience and hurry, when I ought to have been tranquil with the calm of God.

The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians gives instruction upon this point; he said, greatly to the hostile resentment of the poor Corinthians, who thought they could constitute themselves into a jury at any moment, and try, convict, condemn, and hang the criminal by the ticking of their own watches—a little vanity of which we are often guilty—the Apostle said, "Judge nothing before the time." Is there a time? Yes, for life, for death, for judgment; a striking moment, a clang on the belfry of eternity—now!

This makes life very solemn. This consideration, and all the issues that belong to it, should penetrate into our business calculations and arrangements and all our forecasts and vaticinations of things; specially ought it to penetrate into that evil temper of ours, which is prone to ascend the judgment-seat and doom men to penal servitude. "Judge nothing before the

time": you do not know the whole case yet; you think you know it, but you are only common jurymen under the direction of a paid magistracy, and you are only wanted to return a verdict according to the evidence that is laid before you, and within these small points you can build prisons, and put irons on the wrists and ankles of men. It is not judgment, it is a miserably inadequate reply to a sin old as the devil and inwardly as hot as one of hell's own cinders. "Judge nothing before the time": the man is not so bad, or so good, as you think him to be; all the evolution will take place, and the harvest will determine everything; let us have no offhand, hurry-scurry judgments, but a waiting upon God, because only God can show you the evidence of the man's heart, and there you will some day trace how he came to be a criminal, and you will forgive him and kiss him and break bread with him. "Judge nothing before the time."

Do we not in our own common life, as has just been suggested, act upon all these maxims and principles? Certainly we do; we say, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood—" That is just what the Bible says; the play could not have been written but for the prophet; you would have had fewer books if you had not had the Bible, just as you would have had fewer palaces if you had not had the geological rock; all these city buildings are but moulded stones or burnt clay. "Which taken at the flood"—have I not heard you say something like this in commoner terms, in commercial prose? "You were a day too late." That is the doctrine. "You spoke just one day too soon." Why, then, you acknowledge the providence of time, do you? You have closed the Bible and have taken to writing one of your own, and, strange to say, there seems to be a common inspiration amongst Bible-writers, for in their greatest moods, in their victory moments, they often write the same thing, not knowing that the other has written it. "If you had been in time"; this is extra-Biblical, this is a maxim which the street thinks it has discovered for itself; it did not; the atheist chatters prayers; the man who writes on brown paper with pale ink thinking he has written a

Bible of his own could not have written one word if the true Bible had not first been written. "Is there not an appointed time to man upon the earth?" What is the meaning of that mournful inquiry? It relates to decease, to exodus, the decessus which every man must accomplish on his own behalf. There is a time for the pulse to cease; it could only cease a moment sooner by the committal of murder: murder and providence in such a case seem to follow closely upon one another, and it would seem as if sometimes it were uncertain whether murder would get the man or whether providence would get him. The time of the grave digging is fixed, the place of your grave is already marked out; you do not know it, you have never seen it, it may be on the land or it may be in the sea, it may be away in the jungle or in some city churchyard: God knows. "There is an appointed time to man upon the earth."

What, then, have we to do? To wait. You have not to force your destiny, you have not to be impatient with time, but to accept its slow hours; and oh, how leaden can be the foot of time! the weary day, the endless night, the pendulum that oscillates, and yet ticks off no sign of progress, the sleep that will not come, the tranquillity that puckers its face into a bitter sneer! Yet we have to wait; we think we could open the gate now, but God says it is not now to be opened; He keeps us standing outside gates which we could vault, but we must stand outside until the gates are opened. What can keep us in any state of quietude during those moments of resentful, impatient waiting? Only one ministry can keep us right, and that is the ministry of faith. Is there a text upon that subject? There is a beautiful text which every man should write upon the very equator of his heart and make a belt of gold bearing this legend, "He that believeth shall not make haste." The thing is settled for you; it could only be unsettled by an act of defiance and moral bankruptcy on your own part: where you have to live, and what you have to be, and with whom you are to associate, and with whom your destiny is to be wrought out, it is all settled. The building was not begun before the plans were all determined, and so the universe did not open its little prosaic, shopkeeping,

commercial life, with its occasional flashes of the brighter prospect, until God had written His books and sealed them, and one day He will show you what He wrote about your little life: believe in God's writing, you cannot open it, but the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed to open the book, and the invisible writing will burn into visibleness before the final fire. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

Yet we make some little atheistic terms in the trickery of the management of time. "When a convenient day was come." The king arranged it. We create coincidences and call them providences; we ask to be invited, and then declare that we had no idea such an invitation would ever have come to us; we make our own little cunning arrangements and do all in our power to bring them about, and when they come to pass according to our own inclination we say, The most providential thing I ever knew in my life! here is the very thing that I would have desired. You planned it, bit by bit the whole trick was arranged, and when it came to a consummation which gratified your selfish instinct and purpose you said, A more evident manifestation of the hand of God I could not have imagined! Villain! you managed it. When a convenient time or day was come, then the king would have his way. The time was convenient; that is to say, other times were made to tally with it, and to confirm it, and to corroborate it. And we can do a great deal in the management of convenience when we please: we can bring people together without their knowing that they have been circumvented, and we can set events into such a relation as almost to bribe austere time to come before he is due. When we want to serve the devil we can make a convenient appointment. Always carefully distinguish between human convenience and Divine providence.

There are two times that cannot be too soon recognised. "It is high time to awake out of slumber, for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed." That time is ready, the time to get up, to shake off slumber, to rise to kiss the morning wind and to lay hold of the morning plough and have a good long day's work of honest service. Time!

There are two ways of using time. You have seen a man go to his work at the rate of three miles an hour, and leave it at the rate of six. He was the same man, only he was working for another person in the first instance and hastening away on his own business in the second. He is a villain, a robber! "It is high time to awake out of sleep," to be busy, to be doing good, to be working with both hands faithfully and earnestly. Believe in the worker, have no faith in the hireling; never say how little can I do, but how much. But the work will run out if I do too much? Never! God will see to that; the earth has not yet begun to do what she can do; have no fear about ruining God and leaving Providence without resources. The ground on which you live has in it a thousand harvests which you have never calculated; more work would mean more earth, more space to labour. This applies to all departments of life, to agriculture and to merchandise, to intellectual education and social progress and human brotherhood and mutual co-operation. The more you work the more work there will be to do. There is a time to work, and that time is the morning; the night cometh wherein no man can work. If you lose half an hour in the morning you will never overtake it during the day. The man who is going to succeed is the man who gets up first and works with a will, and that tells old mocking, tempting, bribing slumber to stand back till he has tired himself into a condition to deserve and enjoy it.

There is another time, a pre-eminently Biblical time; that time has come, that time has always been here, making its silent or its resounding appeals to human attention. What is that other time? Shall I name it? "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near." "Now"—that is God's time in the matter of salvation of the soul. Blessed are they who hear that *Now* and answer it with a great love!

[*Thursday Morning, 30th March, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, teach us by Thy Spirit how to pray. Subdue our will to Thine ; by Thy grace may we have no other will than Thine own : not our will, but Thine be done. Thou dost permit us to speak unto Thee in prayer, we tell Thee all our heart's feeling and thought and desire ; having told Thee this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we leave it with Thee ; Thou wilt do what is right, best, best not now to our poor seeing, but best in the long run when Thou dost bring up the revealing morning to show us all the secrets of time. Grant unto us the spirit of patience ; work in us the miracle of Thy grace which expresses itself in calm and confident waiting upon God ; may the great voices of old history thrill us with their music, saying, O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, and He will give thee thine heart's desire. Rebuke the spirit of impatience ; spare us, though we be fretful ; Thou knowest our littleness, our ignorance, our peevishness ; count them not against us as crimes that cannot be pardoned, but stoop to our weakness and weariness and infirmity, and grant unto us a long, quiet hearing when we plead our case before Thee ; when we have pleaded our case may we leave it with God, saying in Gethsemane, Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done. If the cup is deep and heavy and bitter, we can drink it all in the name and strength of Jesus Christ, who conquered the Cross and abolished death. Amen.

THE ARGUMENT OF INSTANCES.

"Elias . . . prayed."—JAMES v. 17.



HIS gives us the argument and the defence of a great example. Observe who it was that prayed; not a little obscure, uninfluential man, but a great prophet, whose other name was fire, who lived on high mountains and overheard the soft, rolling, thrilling anthems of heaven. There comes before us no man who has to make good his claim, who has to win our confidence by displaying before us some deeds heroic and beneficent; the man with whom we are now face to face is a man of established fame in Israel, indeed one of the very greatest sons of time. As he stands there, austere, determinate, tremendous in energy and in fiery zeal, I hear concerning him that "*Elias prayed.*" Many of us are fond of great examples, we delight in quoting and following and repeating precedents, we dare not quote an inferior name in support of any dogma or any suggestion, political, commercial, ecclesiastical; we want a great endorsement, a name all capitals, a signature that carries its own vindication and owes nothing to the tribute of our respect. Here is an instance: if we want to follow the great thinker, the great poet, the great author, why not follow the great suppliant, and say to ourselves as we are drawn towards the holy place where the holy altar stands, "*Elias prayed*"? Some of us need the support of great names; we dare hardly babble our little argument in the hearing of the enemy; he would smile upon us, he would treat our logic as infantile and inconclusive, but when we can quote a great name and hide ourselves behind a great historic rock, then we feel strong almost to the point of defiance. Here you have the defence and the explanation and argument of a

great example ; tell the enemy that Elias prayed ; tell your own soul that Elias prayed ; say to your own very inmost self, If Elias indeed prayed, how much greater my need to frequent the place of the altar, how much greater my need to repeat in my little way the historic examples ; they are the mountains of history, they are the capital letters of the literature of the soul. If you want a defence, find it in Elias and Moses and David and Solomon and Nehemiah and Hezekiah ; all these men prayed, why not you ? Are we so much bigger than they that we need not pray, we can live on our own breath, we can live upon our own respiration, we need not go out of ourselves, this little insect lives in its own cocoon ? But Elias prayed, and Moses and David and Solomon and Nehemiah and Hezekiah, are we going to be the odd little man, the eccentric tiny soul, that detaches itself from the great currents of history and the altar, and are you going to live on the vapour of your own breath ?

If Elias prayed, and all these great men prayed, this throws upon us an immense responsibility. We ought to take care how we vote against these men. We should hold our mouths in resolute patience until the whole case has been gone over in the most scrutinizing and penetrating manner before we say we will not pray. We should be very careful how we despise the sun, and light little candles and matches of our own ; we should be jealous of ourselves when we are tempted to give up the great historic habits, the noble examples and precedents of the Church, and take to making alabaster idols of our own little toy gods that we call opinions and views and theories and conceptions and assumptions ; drive no more trade in that poor clay speculation, there is nothing to be got out of it, it is all disappointment and no dividend ; away with your alabaster theories and go back to the grand historic illustrations and precedents of history. Every man incurs a great responsibility when he sets himself against the foremost forces of history ; he is either a very big man or an invisibly small man who sets himself against all the evolution of rising and increasing piety, and who says that he will make a little idol of his own, wetting the

mud with his own spittle and building the degraded dust into some shape he can worship. I will not do it; Elias prayed, I will at least listen to him, and I will copy him so far as I can sincerely and intelligently do so, and I will remind myself that the God who taught Elias to pray can also touch my poor lips with the sacred fire and qualify me by the blood that was shed for sinners to approach the throne and say in my own poor way just what I want. What would you say to this man with his penny box of paints and his poor little halfpenny camel's hair brush who says, I have heard of the great painters, as you call them, I have heard of your Turners of England, and your Angelos and Raphaels and Titianses, I think I have heard something about these little creatures, but I renounce them all, and here is what I will do. To what fame will he come? History saith not, and no prophet is impertinent and impudent enough to predict any fame for a man so foolish and so wasteful of the lessons and the instances of artistic experience. Yet that is what many persons do in the higher levels of the soul's art, the soul's culture, the soul's search after kindred and imperishable fellowship. Can we take the responsibility of defying and despising all that we have learned from history? The prayer would not be altered if only the poorest creatures had prayed, the altar would lose nothing if it had only been surrounded by forsaken women and orphaned children and poor begging creatures that had to pick up their food from door to door, it would still be the altar; in this case, however, it is surrounded by such men as Moses and David and Solomon and Nehemiah and Hezekiah and Elias; all the lion souls of history, the great heroic men that led the civilisation of their age. Are we going to take the responsibility of rebuking our sires and ancestors, and pouring out the expectoration of our irrational contempt upon the whole current and upward movement of the religious thought of the centuries? We can do it, we may be quite equal to it, we can even deny God, much more deny prayer; a man by drawing down his eyelids can shut out the sun, it belongs to the right of every man to close the shutters of his dwelling-house and keep the summer outside, but what a fool he would be! would it not

be wiser to rise early and give broad welcome to the smiling dawn and bid the floods of light come on and fill the chambers with the glory of God? It is not free thinking to despise thinking; it is not individual liberty to scorn the total testimony of the Church.

“Elias prayed.” This cheers us by the most complete encouragement. The way has been made clear to us, we may speak now that these great voices have spoken; by the utterance of such prayers it seems as if a pathway had been cut in the very air itself along which and above which and in association with which our smallest souls may move. These men came back with great answers; God seemed for the time being to put the key of power upon the girdle of each, and enable each to open the door of heaven and take just what he wanted. History is full of encouragement, history constantly says, You do what your great fathers did; you are not equal to them in intellectual capacity, in spiritual sensitiveness, in moral nobility, but you are men, and being men you can pray something, somewhat, somehow, you can sob a prayer, you can melt it into tears. What encouragement have those who follow the prayerless classes I cannot tell. Prayerlessness never saved the world; ten praying men will keep the bolt away from the city towers; we know not how much we owe to prayer; we cannot tell what explains the blessing we received but this morning; they say that light may have left a planet three thousand years ago and just have arrived this morning, and so the treasured prayers of the ages may just now be falling into gracious replies and answers to the exigencies and necessities of the time. It is a great universe, its ministries are sensitive, innumerable, assured; to fall into these great companies that are marching in procession and marching to the music of the Divine going is wisdom, is satisfaction, is heaven. Then let us cheer our souls by the fact that Elias prayed, for in this case Elias is a noun of multitude, he represents all sections of the Church and the altar, all the higher levels and magnitudes of humanity, and when it is said that Elias prayed we may take heart. We know not who is praying for us now; people over the sea may be asking

that God would cheer us who are bereaved and desolated and orphaned ; friends far away may be praying that your trouble and mine may be sanctified and may be made an additional contribution to the massiveness and completeness of our spiritual character ; some little child somewhere—why not on the knee of God?—may be asking that the lonely father and lonely mother down yonder in the little world far off among the clouds may be comforted and cheered and helped and guided until the time of reunion shall come. Who knows? Elias prayed, and to-day we may be getting the advantage of his pungent and thrilling supplications.

“Elias prayed.” That would be a grand stopping-place, but there is not room enough there for all that the soul requires, so we come into the higher sanctuary, and find that “Jesus prayed.” He is never so truly near me as when He says, Let us pray. He would not always permit us to be with Him in prayer ; the greatest spiritual acts of devotion and sacrifice must be completed in solitude :—And Jesus went up into a mountain to pray ; and Jesus left the disciples behind Him, and went forward, and fell on His face, and prayed ; the cold mountains and the midnight air witnessed the fervour of His prayer. We wanted to overhear those prayers, but He would not permit it ; we would have heard, if allowed, the communications that passed between Father and Son, Son and Father, Father, Son, and Spirit, but we were kept outside ; the big sanctuary is outside our environment ; we shall go into it one by one, here an old prophet, there a young one, and yonder a little child ; meanwhile, we cannot hear the higher music or know the meaning of ineffable prayer. Do they pray up yonder ? what is the difference between their prayer and ours ? there is no confession in their prayer, there is no cry for forgiveness in their supplication, for they are away beyond the path where the lion roams and where the wild beast waits for his prey ; but their prayer may be a song, their supplication a new aspect of music, their desire for fellowship the eighth note of music which we have been groping for but have never found. We are poor souls, groping for the fourth dimension, and we cannot find it, and for the eighth tone of music that carries

the gamut to an immeasurable level; behold, it may be amongst the mysteries and wonders of the upper Church; meanwhile, we have enough to be going on with down here, where the clouds are so thick and the nights so long.

Jesus prayed a second time; Elias prayed again; there are amended prayers, enlarged prayers, self-corrected prayers, so that we may go back in Gethsemane and say amid all the gathering glooms, Lord, let me recall that last prayer, and let me say in ampler language, language with infinitely more meaning in it, Not my will, but Thine be done. That prayer is always answered; that indeed is the Lord's prayer, the first answer the Cross, the second the crown.

“Elias prayed.” Oh the blessedness of a prayerful spirit! The meaning is not that we are always to be literally upon our knees or always to be literally engaged in an act of what is known as prayer; the meaning is that we are to live in a prayerful spirit, in a devotional condition of heart and temper, that we are never to be more than a whisper-reach from the Ear that can listen to all our prayers: that is the atmosphere in which the soul thrives and sings. Prayer is not an exercise only, it is an atmosphere; prayer is not a mere act, it is a condition of the soul. The bird is not always flying, but let the fowler lift his piece and the bird finds its wings at once; the bird does not bind down its wings and say, There will be no danger here, I may wait without caring anything as to the condition of my poor wings; the bird's wings are always ready, and in a flash the bird is in the light. It should never be a great labour to us to pray; it will be a labour to us to pray if our prayers are mechanical, stiff, formal, merely literal. Ejaculatory prayer is always sudden; it is an act of flight, it is a throwing out of the arm of the soul to seize the altar. You can pray in a crowd; a prayer is sanctified breathing; a man may so live that his very breath shall be a petition to heaven. Do not imagine that we must have the Church in its literal definition, and the altar as a building in stone, and the priest as a clothed friend and brother in order that we may pray; we can

pray in the crowd, in the solitude, at midnight, at noonday; men ought always to pray and not to faint. Men should always pray their own prayers; even if we are indebted to other men for the words we use we ought so to know the meaning of those words as to make them spiritually our own. Prayer is not an exercise in rhetoric, prayer is the outgoing of the soul, the longing of the heart, the panting after the waterbrooks that flow in heaven. Every man must pray in his own way; every man is entitled by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to pour out his whole heart at the throne of grace, and then he is entitled to say, Not my will, but Thine be done. So he gets the answer of an acquiescent will, he comes back, saying, I am prepared now for whatever issue may arise. What have you been doing? Communing with God. What have you said to the Eternal Father? I have said that I will have no will of my own, I told Him exactly and simply what I should like, I said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, and I prayed in such agony that I thought He would have answered me according to my own will, but the answer came to me in this way, that I was enabled to say, Not my will, but Thine be done; from that moment, continues the soul in explaining what may be called its own biography, I had confidence, imperturbable calm.

Are we, then, to wait for great examples before we do anything? Certainly not; we are to be grateful for noble examples, but we are not to wait, and we are not to keep God waiting. Impatience is a sign of littleness, but earnestness is a sign of spiritual sincerity, and by so much of spiritual rectitude. When the soul is unselfishly earnest as to the attainment and acquisition of certain spiritual riches, the soul may comfort itself with the reflection that it is on the right road; if there be one stain of selfishness in the prayer, then surely the prayer can never find its way to the heart of the Eternal. If we make an investment of our prayers they will be returned to us, and we shall be bitterly and rightfully disappointed. We must look after our prayers; when we have prayed to a friend we expect a reply; to send a request to a friend is, in a certain sense, to pray to him, and if we do not

receive an answer we begin to wonder, then perhaps to complain. We may have the answer before we breathe the prayer; whilst we are breathing the prayer we may receive the answer; it is said of the great prophet, whilst he was yet praying the angel spake to him. There is a sensitive intercommunication of ministry; whilst the prayer is proceeding the answer may be descending. Under other circumstances we may have to wait a year for an answer, or ten years, or a long lifetime, but a long lifetime is nothing when it is over, the length is in the living of it, in the ticking-off of each particular minute: how many seconds there are in some minutes! how many hours may be condensed into a second! time is not always the same, it is a matter of consciousness, a matter of sensitiveness, a very metaphysical matter, despise metaphysics as we may; to some conditions of soul there is no time: joy has no clock; grief hears every click of the pendulum.

And all our prayers must be prayed in the name of Jesus Christ. Prayer is not enough, it must be Christian prayer; it is enough then to be answered as Jesus Christ would answer it. Jesus Christ did not get the answer that His human nature expected; the devil might have pitied Him in Gethsemane; when a man is reduced to the blood-sweat the gaiety of hell might for the moment be eclipsed: there is a suffering that wins, there is an agony that sculptures a face into a nobler beauty; there is a loss that is gain. I know, therefore, what I shall do; they tell me Elias prayed, and David and Solomon and Nehemiah and Hezekiah and Christ and Paul and John. I will join their company; Lord, make me one of that grand host. If we are wrong we shall be wrong together; I would rather fail with them than succeed with some others. I have asked the enemy to produce a corresponding list of men who have led the world and taught and blessed and edified the world, and the enemy has handed me a sheet of blank paper. On what side shall we rank ourselves, with the men of prayer or the men of prayerlessness? What is your company? what is your badge? how stand ye in the historic roll? I am but poor, weak, ignorant; these great souls you have mentioned were noble,

heroic, beneficent, and if I may by the grace of the Cross write my poor name on their list, I should like to sign a list that bears upon it such names as Moses and Elias and David and Jesus and Paul. To have my nameless name associated with such fame, well, I shall be living in reflected glory, and they will not despise me, because they will judge me not by my effort, but by my intention, not by what I have done, but what I would have done if I could. That is the generous judgment of Divine justice.

[*Thursday Morning, 6th April, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, enable us to believe in Thy righteousness. Clouds and darkness are round about Thee, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne. We cannot see Thee, but our hearts feel after Thee ; they know Thee as the blind man knows the light : shine upon our hearts, smile upon our weary lives, bring back some hint of spring and summer to those who have been in the desolation and terror of winter. Enable us to believe in Thy providence, in Thy grace, in Thy tenderness ; it is infinitely hard so to do. Thou hast set one thing over against another, and intermixed and bewildered our accounts, so that we cannot tell the right in all cases, and we are often tempted to fall into the wrong. We have spoiled our own lives ; God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions ; we are the victims of our own ingenuity and fraudulence and inventiveness and hypocrisy. This have we found, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked ; it hides its wickedness in its piety, it conceals its treason in its prayers : oh grant unto us a new heart, and create within us a right spirit ! We must be born again ; we can only be pardoned by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost ; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to Thy mercy dost Thou save us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Do Thou come within the innermost sanctuary of our motive and purpose and desire and wonder, and there work out the miracle of Thy renewing grace.

We pray at the Cross, the eternal altar, where the red blood is that atones and redeems because it is precious beyond all gold and rubies. Amen.

THE REASON OF THINGS.

"I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things."—ECCLES. vii. 25.



APPLIED mine heart to seek out the reason" is enough; "of things" is a phrase put in by men who, with mistaken generousness, desire to assist inspiration. There are many persons who are not indisposed to give a helping or hindering hand to the Holy Spirit. Here is a man, Solomon or Coheleth, or some famed king of romance, who gives his heart to search and to seek out wisdom and the reason: what men have always been seeking for since a memorable interview in a memorable garden. This was the devil's very first known trick; he said, Ye shall be as gods, knowing, living, enjoying yourselves, having broad and clear insight into the reason and metaphysic of your own nature and the economy within which you live; there is nothing between you and the completest scholarship but the participation of one mouthful of this tree's fruit; then you will be metaphysicians, then you will be behind the north wind, then you will look upon essences, then you will share the throne of your Maker; why not be a god? eat, and be deified! Man has ever since been groping for that door, the opening of which would admit him into the innermost sanctuary and permit him to gaze upon the real meaning of the figurative and emblematic stones Urim and Thummim. Man has always been seeking for the reason of things, the philosopher's stone, the lost key, the metaphysical principle which will admit him into a higher citizenship and entitle him to claim a broader and more enduring friendship. Solomon would come forth and outrun all competitors and rivals, saying in effect, Sirs, stand back, you are of no use in this great

tussle, I only can overthrow and vanquish the opposition which has heretofore baffled and defied the human mind : back ! And Solomon went in to inquire of witch or wizard or uncanny and unclean thing, or holy and robed figure, asking querulously or piously, What is the meaning of it all ? show me how the universe is moulded and how it is directed. The universe would not listen to a grand king, to a suppliant whose shoulders were loaded with velvet and gold ; the universe can be very dumb and chill and silent : sometimes not a word could be extorted from the lips of Jesus. Solomon, after groping and wondering and knocking and imploring and doing all things that a king could do, rose from his knees and said, I have not found it ; either there is nothing to find, or what there is to find lies beyond my ken and reach.

He is a very foolish man who wants to pry too much into the reason of things. A good many things in life have to be taken just as they are and just as they come, and the Lord permits a ready simple reading of many things which might be so taken as to perplex faith and bewilder imagination. Men are in some instances made to pry ; they cannot be content with what is known and visible and accessible ; some men cannot live on the commonplace, some dainty souls could never live upon simple mother-made bread, they must have other things to eat, and they cannot get them, and in a vain futile endeavour to get these other things their souls wither and perish and pass away. Do not be too wise ; be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself overwise : why shouldest thou destroy thyself ? These are the inquiries of the wise man himself. Why try to climb the stars when there is no ladder ? why endeavour to outstretch thy proportions and thy faculties by trying to do what it is impossible for men of your stature and compass to accomplish ? why not say, I am five feet high, God has appointed my stature ; or six feet high, and beyond that I cannot reach except the short length of my own arm ; beyond that small reach the heavens are stretched out in inaccessible pomp ; come, then, if ever I have to walk upon yonder stars as I walk upon this little world which I call the

earth it shall be done in God's good time; meanwhile, I have an immediate duty, that I must accept, that I must loyally and obediently execute. That would be wisdom worthy of king or peasant.

We cannot, however, all avoid looking round and wondering at the marvellous structure and economy and intermixture and dramatic interplay of things. It is a right wonderful universe so far as we can see it, and that is a very little way and a very little portion; still, if things be so mysterious, at once so august and so abject within the little sphere that is visible or accessible, what may they be, what must they be, on the wider lines, on the complete outline, as God has figured and controlled it? For my own part, and this is a matter upon which personal testimony must be taken for what it is worth, I have come to the conclusion that there is no explanation of life, nature, and all things under the sun and above the sun that we have heard anything about that is so simple, so complete, and so satisfactory as that they were all made and are all under the gentle and mighty control of a living personal God. We have examined other things and have been disappointed; we have hewn out to ourselves cisterns, and we ourselves have come to the conclusion that they were broken cisterns that could hold no water, and when we have been asked whether the explanation of a living personal God is not full of mystery we have been compelled to say, It is most certainly a mystery, but we had to choose between a mystery of light and a mystery of darkness, and the word light charmed us, promised us something, nay, was itself immediately a living and most tender blessing; so we said we would vote light. That is our position; we do not claim to have got rid of mystery, but we felt that darkness was a greater mystery than light, that the negative was more troublesome than the positive; we came speedily to the decision, based upon troubled experience, that there is no prison so terrible and so immeasurable as the prison of darkness; a man may not stir in the dark, he may fall over a precipice, he may move into the jaws of a ravenous beast, he may touch something gruesome and not to be thought of by the imagination; he will wait. But man loves the light, though he cannot explain it.

Light is one syllable, but it seems to hold all literature, as I have seen a dewdrop hold the sun. So, then, as Christian believers we do not claim to have escaped all mystery or to be able to explain all difficulties and clear away all obstacles, we make no such foolish claim or pretension; but inasmuch as there must be mystery on any solution that is suggested respecting the nature, compass, destiny of this universe, we have concluded to accept the grand assumption that over all, above all, in all, around all, there is a living, an infinite, a personal God.

Can we explain God? Most certainly such explanation is absolutely impossible; when He comes to us He comes in condescension, He dare not bring His total self-hood with Him, He leaves His robes, He accepts a Bethlehem that He may not frighten us. We are taunted that we do but remove the mystery one step backwards; precisely, and there we are content to leave it, because we are still finite, we cannot measure beyond our arithmetic; at a certain time our arithmetic itself goes mad and jabbers and gibbers words that have no meaning in them because arithmetic, scared and affronted by unimaginable magnitudes, has given vent to its troubled wonder in unnamable and innumerable ciphers. We know that we remove the mystery one step backwards, but we also know that we are so made that the greatest man amongst us cannot step over the pool of the Atlantic at one stride. There are some things we cannot do and ought not to attempt: to know this is wisdom, and such wisdom is the beginning of piety.

Some of the reasons of things may be discovered almost immediately by a test which we call by the Latin word *conduct*. A man is tempted to think that when he has said *conduct* he has pronounced a final verdict. Men will have to eat their own verdicts by-and-by, and when they do so they will sit down to indigestible feasts. Of course it does seem that *conduct* will explain a great many things. You say, for example, here is a case of honourable promotion in social life; you set yourselves to account for this promotion, and you say, The reason is on the very face of the thing; here you have a man rising early,

working diligently, retiring late at night, thinking about his work and thinking about little else except such relative subjects as are cognate and acceptable because of their cognateness: who could expect anything else than a house on the hillside, a garden facing the sun, a home full of comfort and peace? The other man was indolent, slothful, unthrifty, he scattered what little possession he had to begin with, and you cannot wonder that he is in these troubled straits because of his own conduct; you need not go to holy book or holy man to ask for an explanation of such a pitiable condition of affairs. Here is a man who has gathered around him much social confidence: there is no difficulty about explaining it, he is a man of self-control, a man of great intellectual shrewdness, he has lived a spotless life in the eyes of his neighbours, and he has respect; some other man has been self-indulgent, wanton, loose in every desire, unbridled in every lust: is there any need to go to preacher or to commentator to know the reason of these things? The reason is written upon the very face of the situation. That is very good up to a given point; that did not escape the keen eyes of Solomon, and he therefore says, "There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in wickedness." That is the side that must be taken in if we would institute a complete and just purview of the conditions and issues of human life so far as they are known to us. We have no difficulty about the sober man having a good balance at the bank, we have no difficulty about the glutton going back and discovering his heredity in the sty and the trough; these things explain themselves; but here is a man good who is in difficulty, and here is an atheist who pulls down his barns and builds greater, so stupendous is the harvest. Here is as godly a father and mother as ever lived, and they have but one son, and he is under sentence of death! And here you find father and mother anything but good, lovable, and creditable, and their son is a student of holy mysteries and an expositor of the laws of the kingdom of God. These are the contradictions and painful ironies that we cannot explain; when therefore we are told that conduct explains everything, we are

compelled to deny the suggestion and to point to facts as the justification of our denial.

The religious explanation is to my own mind the largest and truest that has yet been suggested. Certainly it leaves mysteries, but it also interposes this consideration, You are finite, God is infinite, you can see but a very small portion of any case or situation just now; by-and-by the clouds will be dispersed and God will accompany you over the whole line of His providence so far as you are concerned, and He will give you the explanation, the answer shall follow the enigma, the solution shall quickly ensue upon the problem, and one day you will be able to see and to say that God has even in the night-time been working for the culture and the final sanctification and uttermost benediction of human nature. Then how does the religious suggestion or explanation end? In this grand anthem: O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, and He will give thee thine heart's desire; what thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter. God's grand economy is not a hemisphere, it is a complete globe, and not until we have seen it all can we understand any part of it, for the trouble of earth may have something to do with the higher melody of heaven, and the very griefs we endure may be sculpturing upon the face of the soul a beauty and an expressive loveliness which otherwise they never would have acquired. The religious conception of all these things is ennobling, it enables the soul to say, It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth good in His sight; it is the Lord, let Him turn my tears into telescopes through which I can see the furthest stars in His empire; it is the Lord, let Him tear me to pieces that He may build me up again a stronger, truer, and manlier man. These are the teachings of the Christian religion. We do not profess to accept them all at once; we do not profess to be able to trample all other troubles under foot and to sing psalms and anthems at a moment's notice, but deep down in the soul there is a sanctuary the foundations of which have not been disturbed; by-and-by that sanctuary may rear itself into a temple covering the whole life and soul, and that grand spiritual

temple, the miracle of the Holy Ghost, may resound with the sweetest praises of God.

The Christian conception is not only ennobling, it is tranquilising; one of the special miracles of the Gospel of Christ is that it works peace in the heart: Jesus rose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace; be still: and immediately there was a great calm. So it is in the poor, troubled, tormented human heart; it looks wildly round to find the old beauty which it almost worshipped, and it cannot see the fair face; it listens for the coming of the foot which always brought music with it, and there is no footfall on the stair or on the garden-path; and yet deep down in all these ineffable sadnesses there is a Sabbath, a rest day, a sea too deep to be perturbed at its innermost centre.

The religious conception is not only ennobling and tranquilising, it is inspiring. Watchman, what of the night? He says, I see a quivering as of an awakening star. Again we ask, and he says, The dawn is already on the hilltop. Again, and he says, Awake and rise, for the sun is here, and to feel it claims your service and promises you a great reward.

In all such inquiry, inquiry into the reason of things and the mysteries and the troubles of life, the best example is the example given us by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not say, "There is a God"; He would have belittled His religion and He would have discredited His own credentials. If He had said, "There is a God," He would have made the occasion contemptible. What did Jesus Christ do? He assumed God; He did not say to man, Now before I can have any communication with you I must explain your physiology, your psychology, and the total mystery of your double nature; He made no such academic or pedantic remarks; He looked round, and said, Repent! That was beginning at the great point, the uppermost and yet the deepest point; that was a cry that covered the whole case. Jesus Christ did not say, You must pray; He assumed the religious nature of man, it was one of His fundamental and essential assumptions; not, I must teach you to pray, but When ye pray say. He might as well have sat down and said to His disciples,

Now I will teach you the mystery of inspiration and respiration, I must show you how to inhale the air and how to exhale the air. He made no such infantile remark; He took man as a necessarily praying being, groping round and wondering, and then saying to him, Not there, but here when ye pray say – and then He gave an outline of prayer which the adoring and solicitous soul might adopt with edification. So we do not preach “There is a God”; we degrade the sanctuary when we deliver in it courses of lectures to prove the existence of God; why, we proved that to our own complete satisfaction before we built the house; we did not build a house to endeavour to lecture ourselves into an acceptance of God; we believed, and therefore we worshipped; we sought God, and built a house for Him such as He enabled us and directed us. And that is true of every house of prayer, of the great cathedral or the little hut in the forest. So we must assume God, and we must wait.

What is the upshot of Coheleth’s inquiries? “This only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.” A grand discovery, a sweeping and complete theology! God is right; God made man upright; if man has fallen God is not responsible; man is a fallen creature, but God will redeem. When God has made a man He does by the very act of making promise also to redeem. Creation without redemption, how incomplete, and from the Divine side how impossible! Then rest thee, my soul, within thee, and be no more disquieted. Metaphysics have no peace for thee; thou canst not go far enough along that dim line. The place to halt at is faith, simple, obedient, humble, loving, triumphant faith. Lord, increase our faith!

[*Sunday Morning, 9th April, 1899.*]

Prayer.

MOST merciful Father, Thou wilt come to us in Thine own way ; we shall know Thy coming by the warmth of our hearts, by the obedience of our spirits, by our willingness to accept Thy will and renounce our own. Thou dost make Thyself known unto men by the glowing heart ; they cannot tell how they know Thee, but they know that they know Thee ; it is a knowledge within knowledge, a wonderful communication of spirit to spirit, a living mystery, a most vital pathos. We are travelling on the road, and we are sore distressed ; we are but two in number and our trust is dead ; but if Thou wilt draw nigh unto us, One like unto the Son of man, the road will be short and the air will be balmy and the whole consciousness will be a living and tender peace. Grant unto us, we humbly beseech Thee, these undeniable signs of Thy presence and Thine influence and Thy benediction. Thou knowest the weary travellers and the pilgrims who have lost all heart on the journey, and would dig their grave here and now and go no further into the mocking sand. Thou knowest also those who are full of joy and gladness and brightest anticipation, who see gates among the clouds, openings in the far-away horizon which fall back upon the land of light and liberty and eternal bliss. Thou knowest those who are sordid and grovelling, seeking in the dust what they never can find there, who are content with time and space, and know not the mystery of the holy ambition and the audacious impatience that would leap over the separating acres, and see and come face to face with the whole company of heaven. According to our varied estate of heart and mind and hope Thou canst come to us, and Thou wilt draw near unto us, and Thou wilt make all hearts in the sanctuary glad because of the Cross and the open tomb of the risen Lord. We come into Thy presence for special joys, for the gladness that cannot wane and fade and die ; we come for the upper joy, the supernal bliss : may we be content with no minor blessing, may we know that this is not the blessing that Thou hast in reserve for us and for all who seek Thy face through the power of the Cross of Christ ; may we be content with nothing but Thy greatest promises, the redemption which Thou didst speak unto our fathers, and which Thou didst repronounce on Calvary ; may we claim great things in the great Name ; and give us the godly dissatisfaction which can refuse Thine answers until they suffice our hunger and our love. Thou knowest us altogether, and this is our chief terror and our principal joy : it is a terror when

we say to ourselves in the time of sin and wrong thought and wrong deed, Thou God seest me ; it is our supreme joy when we know that Thou dost read the motive and the innermost heart and the deep secret purpose of the soul. Thou knowest wherein we do ourselves injustice because of the weakness of the flesh. Thou dost interpret the motive of the spirit, the desire, the ambition and the prayer of the heart. Thou knowest what temples we build Thee in our own love, though we build none in visible stone ; Thou knowest what we would do if we could, but the enemy is severe, his fire is murderous, and our fleshly strength and our environment are weak and poor and yielding. Thou seest the heart, the deepest love, the struggling and hungering desire to be more like Thy Son, and to serve Him with a steadier aim. Thy house is full of light, our lives need all the light Thou canst give them ; the valley shuts out the sun, there are large patches of hard land where no corn can grow, for they never see the morning, they know not of the gospel of noonday. Thou knowest the breadth of the wilderness, that great and terrible wilderness through which Thou dost bring men to Canaan : pity us, stoop far down to our trembling weakness, and give us heart again if but for one brief day. Thou knowest those who are wounded in the desert, who are lying bleeding in the wilderness with none to pity, and who rely therefore on the pity of Divine tears : O Thou who knowest all the way, withhold not from Thy servants the comfort which they need. Pity the frivolity of the fool, the worldliness of the unwise, and the blindness of those who cannot see the unseen. Thou knowest the pitiableness of their condition, they have no kingdom of God, they have no gates of pearl swinging back upon kingdoms of light ; yet they are here, and inasmuch as they are in Thy presence and in the attitude of prayer, may their attitude become a reverent expectancy, and may that expectancy be answered by some immediate vision of Thy love. Thou knowest those whose hearts are graves, whose homes are wildernesses, and whose beds are sharp thorns, and Thou wilt not withhold from them the staying power of Thy tender grace. Thou knowest the orphaned children, the little helpless ones, the misery that is quite beyond words, and the desolation which human pity cannot reach. This is the hour and the power of Thy grace, where none but Thyself can come. Come quickly, Thou redeeming, healing Jesus ! Amen.

CXC.

NOT SUFFICIENT.

"Lebanon is not sufficient to burn."—ISA. xl. 16.



HERE are so many things in life upon which we have to write the legend, Not sufficient. So many parcels bear that mocking inscription: where is there a parcel that bears the legend, Enough? I have not found it under the sun, I am not aware that any man has found it; so far as I can read the scrolls of the forests and the seas and the stars, I can only make out this inscription, Not sufficient. What we have yet discovered is but a beginning, a hint, an elementary idea of something we would express, but cannot. On all the little toys in the nursery the children who have grown a little have written, Not sufficient; and they have left all the toys which they declared they never could leave; emptiness is behind them and dissatisfaction, and in front of them a promise, a hope, a wordless anticipation, which in its turn will come to, Not sufficient.

We write this upon Time; we have told off its centuries and have said at the close, Not room enough, not breathing space enough, not sufficient. We have received satisfactions and have been pleased with them for the moment and have said, Now we have entered into rest, and lo! our satisfactions have perished in the using, satisfaction has become satiety, nausea, and utterest disappointment. Who will show us the sufficient? who will lead us to the land of Enough?

We have written this same legend upon the parcel or estate which we call by the great and promising name of Life, and we have lived long enough to know that life is only a variety of death, if there

be not something beyond it, something explanatory, comforting, and crowning. Men may not believe in what is theologically defined as immortality, but no man yet has ever been satisfied with time, really, truly, deeply satisfied; he has wanted another day, another century, and then the tower will be completed and the topstone will be brought on with shouting of Grace, glory, enough! and he dies whilst he thus exclaims. You cannot deny this spirit of dissatisfaction, sense of insufficiency; we cannot get rid of this invisible and tormenting spirit of disappointment and expectation that carries no answer in its own heart; there must be someone somewhere who can talk to us luminously and helpfully: oh that I knew where I might find him! I would show him where the thorn pierces me, and where the blood oozes, and where the wound has no balm. Has he not been found? We think that in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the gospel of morning and spring and resurrection, we have just what we need by way of explanation and consolation and the best and most rational hopefulness.

You are so far with the subject? If you have had enough in the City, why are you going to-morrow? if you have had enough of gold, why peruse the gold story of every day, that tale of balances and values and international and approximate calculations, and that novel of lies? Why do you not lay down the lying paper and say, We have had enough of you; now we will go into the wilderness with our book and we will company with the angels and have a large banking account in heaven, a banking account of prayers and ideas and conceptions and anticipations? Why not shake off the robe of sordidness and clothe your shoulders with the garments of song and of light? You are seeking something in the city which you will never find; if you find part of it you will be disappointed by what you do find; you will not discover heaven upon earth, there is no room for heaven in such a cloud-world as this, a mere tuft of vapour, with an occasional star gleaming through the haze. If you have had enough, why sow more seed, why expose yourselves to more spring winds and winter storms, why tempt the sea again? There is a spirit

within you which says, Not sufficient, not enough, something more we must have. That spirit is a right spirit; it may be turned to bad uses and may be forced into wicked and most impious limitations; the spirit itself is right, it is the spirit of immortality, the spirit of conscious or unconscious sonship, in distinct and direct relationship to the fountain of all life and immortality. Do not discourage the discontent; encourage it, instruct it, inspire and direct it.

“Lebanon is not sufficient to burn” if we are trying to make up to God for our wrongdoing and most unfilial and horrible wickedness alike of sin and of ingratitude and of everything that belongs to ingratitude and sin. Let us cut down the forest on the hill and burn it, and of what avail will be the white ashes? can they touch the mystery of sin? is there any equivalent in matter to the great claim of wounded law, righteousness, and truth? When we talk of Lebanon and sin we talk of terms that have no relation to one another; they belong to different spheres, we are speaking about two different worlds and categories of things. Sin has no material equivalent; it is not an account that has a debtor and creditor side, and that we can settle by giving so much in return; the sinner cannot touch his own sin, it is within him, he has hurt the universe, he has pained God. What will Lebanon do for him? he is no longer master of the situation, he has parted with his strength, with his individuality, with every faculty and power he had that lay in any moral and spiritual direction, and he is left with nothing but the crushing sense of his own responsibility. Truly, in the most spiritual sense, what he has done cannot be undone. There is a metaphysic in these things, a hidden, all but undiscoverable theology of action; every deed has its own theologic aspect and its theologic explanation. It is a larger world than we think, and we cannot dismiss theology with a sneer or get rid of the metaphysical mystery of things by some rude guffaw of fool’s laughter. The material can never overtake the spiritual. How many forces will it take to equal the Cross, understanding by the term Cross all that is meant by atonement, expiation, reconciliation with God, the pardon of sin, the purification of the life, and the ultimate sanctification

of the heart and life? You are talking about quantities that can never be balanced. How many beasts shall we drive in from the slopes of Lebanon to total up to the Son of God? how many rams of Nebaioth will ye give for Christ, and say, Enough! a Man on one side and the beasts of the mountain on the other? You cannot correlate these terms, you cannot set them in lines of equivalents; they do not belong to the same series, they have no relation to the same significance. If you take Lebanon symbolically, if you regard the beasts typically, you may make some use of the burning wood and the bleeding throats, but that is all; you must look beyond the beast and say, This means some day a man. What man? The Son of God. Do not stop at Lebanon in tree or in beast and say, This is all and this is sufficient. So long as you can say about the trees of Lebanon and the beasts thereof, Insufficient, but typical, intermediary, then you are right. Never stop at the wrong place.

No forest can make up for a broken heart. If you have wounded some spirit, if you owned the bank of your nation you could not pay in gold for that wound. You could mock the wound, you could say, I have come to pay you, there is your gold, now be quiet. Gold can never touch such misery; the trees of the forest, the beasts of the mountains, the cattle on all the hills, do not touch the sore that is in the grieved, the bruised, and the broken heart. We cannot pay for sin in gold; if we were to bring gold to God He would say, You have only brought Me what is Mine, the gold and the silver is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, these cannot offer any sacrifice, you do but mock Me in making Me a present of My own. We never can buy pardon. You break your word, and if you pour your gold out at the feet of the man you have wronged, you do not touch what you have done in the destruction of that man's conscience, in the wounding and slaying of that man's heart. You cannot follow the consequences of your own deeds; the deed is yours, the consequence belongs to the universe. No man can run after his own influence and withdraw it or destroy it; it is an influence that has gone forth, and it must

work out the mysterious act, it may be ages after the actor himself is dead.

So, then, if we are bearing burdens of wood and driving before us herds of cattle in the hope that we shall satisfy the claim and the demand of the law, we are engaged upon a fool's errand, and we know it; deliverance must arise from another quarter. If law is all, we cannot overtake it; if matter or nature is all, then we are plunged into the gloom of despair. You cannot wipe away a child's tear from the heart, you can only dry it on the cheek, the tear is away where your hand can never touch it. Therein lies some hint of the mystery of sin; we cannot get at it, it lies beyond our power, we can only pray about it and commit it to God, and plead for God's mercy; and only the Infinite can overtake that which has gone out of us beyond recall. It is a pity to treat such questions roughly, it is an impiety to endeavour to laugh them out of consideration: they belong to the very essence and staple of life, and if we do not consider these things we are dead men. It is, however, in the night of despair that the stars of the Gospel begin to shine, it is through the gloom that the light comes, and what the law could not do in that it was weak, Jesus Christ did by taking upon Himself our flesh, our manhood, and becoming as it were a Sin-offering unto God for us. What the law could not do the Law-giver could do. That is the Gospel. Sin and law had to reveal themselves to the heart before the Gospel could have any hearing. Man must have a long period of experiment as to what he could do in the matter of sin, and the Lord permitted him to work through joys and disappointments, through weary centuries and interminable ceremonies, until at last the poor heart gave way and said it could do no more; and when the heart could do no more for itself, then came Bethlehem at the right moment, in the right way, with the right gospel, with the infinite love. Man must be revealed to himself before God can be revealed to him. So long as man has one little piece of broken mirror in which he thinks he can see himself and be pleased with himself, he is not prepared to receive the great revelation of the

Gospel; it is when he says he can do no more and all that he has done comes back upon him as a great grin and gruesome mockery, taunting him day and night for the rest of his tormented life, it is then that he says, My God! what is Thy will? what is the way of escape? who shall deliver me from this body and burden of death? When man has come to that point, he can go to church and be comforted; when the soul has come to that pass, he can hear the poorest preacher who preaches the Gospel and thank him and bless him and kiss his heart, in that he brings close all possible and sufficient redemption. It is only when we are driven down into the deepest valley of darkness that we can begin to say and to sing, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings! It is when we need the messenger that we can truly welcome him.

“Lebanon is not sufficient to burn.” This is true not only in reference to sin, but in reference to gratitude. We never can pay for spiritual service; between the gold and the service there is no relation. What shall I render? is a bigger question than it seems. You never can repay a spiritual favour. You can repay gold with gold, you can take a receipt, but not for spiritual ministry. Oh the mockery, the most horrible blasphemy, that a man is going to pay his teacher, monitor, his leader in prayer, his chief of thought and highest sentiment! Many persons are under the impression that they can pay for a book. It is impossible, it is absurd. You can pay certain men concerned in the production of the book, but if the book is a book of God, part of the very Bible of heaven, a gospel that haunts your life with blessing and that goes after you through the wilderness and brings you home and comforts and redeems and heals you, if you piled bank on bank you could not begin to liquidate the infinite obligation. We never can pay Jesus Christ, we can recognise His claim; that is all we can do with one another. You may have done some great and holy deed for me, and all I can do is to press your hand, but with a meaning you understand; part of the payment is in the meaning; not handshaking, but handshaking with a meaning

is gratitude, is love, is partial repayment to the extent of recognition of a debt that has no arithmetical equivalent. Herein is that common saying most true, I do not value the gift so much as I value the feeling which prompted it. That is a quotation from nearly every grateful speech which man makes to man; that quotation embodies a philosophy, it represents a theology, it comes very near to being a statement of the highest truths that can engage the human mind. Do you value the handful of flowers? Certainly, they are most precious and most welcome, in themselves they have a value because they came out of the garden of God, and the garden of God lies in the midst of the heart of God; but what I do value even more than the flowers, any grateful man would say, is the feeling which went and gathered them, that planned the basket, that plucked the fair gossams and put them into a vessel more golden than gold; it is that feeling, says the grateful heart, I wish to recognise, and by kindred feeling in part at least to repay. You could buy a field of daisies, you may be a man proud of the depth of his pocket, and you could buy stacks of daisies and despise the accumulation, but you could not buy the love of that little child who spontaneously ran into the meadow and plucked the reddest-edged daisy for you and for nobody else, and that came and put it into the middle of your hand, and then looked at you with a face full of meaning. O, sir! go with your bags and buy that love if you can! it is not sold in the market-places of time.

Herein we come upon the innermost truths of the Gospel. We cannot repay Christ, we cannot give God an equivalent of our sin, we cannot give God an equivalent for His mercies; we can ask, What shall we render? what can we do? then we are upon the right ground and we have started the right line of inquiry. But you can only repay love with love; along that line lies a great possibility. God seeks not mine, but me, the man; He cannot be paid with what I have in my hand, but He is willing to accept as part payment as it were—yet He would discourage the use of that word in its mercantile sense—the love in my heart, the temple I would build Him if I could: and who knows but that many a poor man may be credited

with having built the Lord many a temple? The man never laid one stone upon another, the man had no money with which to buy stone and timber, but in his heart he built the Lord a million temples, and not one of them escaped the notice of the Architect and the Builder of the universe. There is a life within a life, and one day we may know that ineloquence has uttered the sublimest prayers and that out of poverty has come many an acceptable sacrifice. Renounce Lebanon if you want to pay God even in the matter of sin or even in the matter of gratitude; rend your hearts, not your garments; bring your hearts, but not your Lebanons. If you bring these sacrifices, the Lord will smell the sweet savour, and He will know that the earth which He has redeemed is becoming an altar on which are offered daily acceptable sacrifices.

[*Sunday Morning, 18th June, 1899.*]

Prayer.

COME, Lord Jesus, come quickly ! We are waiting for Thee ; without Thee we cannot proceed. We remember Thy word, Without Me ye can do nothing ; we remember Thy servant's word, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Lord Jesus, disappoint us not ! If we do not see Thy face with the vision of our heart, the sun will be but a mockery, and the summer will bring no plenteousness. If Thou wilt come near us we shall be satisfied ; we shall know Thy nearness by the growing warmth of our soul, and we will one day say to one another, Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way ? We shall not mistake the fire of Thy love ; there is no warmth like the love of the heart that bled for us. We have come to sing our morning psalm ; we will speak of Thy goodness and Thy mercy, Thy judgment and Thy great power, Thy tenderness and Thine outstretched arm. We will collect into one memorial view all that Thou hast done for Thy people, and we will hear the rising and falling houses of history say one by one, His mercy endureth for ever ! and the song shall not die on our ungrateful lips. We have reason to speak good of the mercy of the Lord, for it hath comforted us exceedingly, it hath spent a long night of sorrow with us, and did not leave us for one moment until the morning star rose upon our grief, and even then that star brightened into the sun, and the sun was the glory of Thy love, and Thy love did fill the firmament. We would speak of our sins, but they are all forgiven us ; we will not recall a night which Thou hast banished ; where sin abounded grace did much more abound : we will dwell upon Thy "much more," Thy multiplied billows, Thy mountain upon mountain, for the height and the width of the firmament is a poor measure of the vastness of Thy love. May we praise Thee for the way along which we have come. Some cannot do so yet, for Thou hast smitten them dumb, and plucked the rising psalm from their trembling lips ; they cannot yet fully sing Thy praise, but they can hesitatingly speak some words about it : by the culture and nutrition of Thy grace Thou wilt one day enable them to carry speech up into music, and music shall be as heaven. But now many of Thy people are in the valley, and under the cypress, and the shadows are very long and broad and cold, and for many a weary mile there is no voice to cheer ; laughter is heard from the house of the fool, but there is sadness and there is great mourning near the altar of

the house. 'And to some Thou hast given great joy, and filled young hearts with promise, and Thou hast mercifully hidden the future from them, so that they shall not know when 'the belfry shall change its note and speak in its solemn clangour of death and the grave; Thou dost not lift the screen of time more than one day at once. It is enough, it is beautiful, it is love in action, and we thank Thee for our ignorance of the unborn time. If there are any before Thee who have mistaken life, and are dancing through it in revel and in a foolish joy, teach them that there is no gladness, real and true and abiding, that has not melancholy at its heart. Lead us from page to page in the book of Thy life-literature; enable us to be satisfied with one page at once, and to read it diligently and lovingly and hopefully.

Lord Jesus, come quickly! The broken heart wants Thee, the troubled spirit can only be healed by the balm of Thy grace. Lord Jesus, come quickly! We are all waiting for Thee. Amen.

CXCI.

WAITING FOR CHRIST.

"They were all waiting for Him."—LUKE viii. 40.



WHY did they not go on? There were plenty of them, a hundred men or a thousand; why did they wait for another man? We pay unconscious tributes to the Son of God. To be waited for is a creed, a faith, an up-rising and an outgoing of the soul, a testimony rich as blood, quivering and tender as anxious love. "They were all waiting for Him." He was but one, why wait? why not proceed? We know why; the heart always knows why. There is a great gathering in the church, and every attendant has flowers in her hand or his hand; there is a light on every face, there is a subtle joy thrilling the air: why do these people wait? why does the priest tarry? why do all the attendants look at one another? Because the bride has not yet arrived. What, waiting for one woman? Ay! If thou, poor fool, couldst read life aright, that is life—

waiting for one, the other one, the completing one, the vital one. There must be hundreds of people in the church, why can they not proceed? The priest is robed, his book is in his hands, and even the bridegroom is there: why not proceed? You know why. It is just so with all crowds and all families and all associations of life. There is one wanting; when he comes we shall begin; when she appears the trumpet will sound. I was sitting in a great hall thronged with some five thousand enthusiasts: why did we not go on? Because *he* had not yet come. Sitting immediately in front of me was Henry Rogers, the famous Edinburgh reviewer, and a great critic and philosopher; and turning round, he said, "Now we are all ready for the great man." Rogers himself was immeasurably the greatest man in that assembly, but he, too, was waiting, and presently the whole air rent with a thrilling cheer, a noise of gladness, for John Bright came up the platform stairs and passed to the chairman's side. Now! Why not an hour ago? The magnetic presence was wanting, the magnetic touch was waited for; no other man could take up just the position which that man was about to assume; when he came, beat the drum, wave the red banner, for the man for whom we have been waiting is face to face with us, and we shall catch his solemn music in a moment. They all waited for Christ. They were some thousands strong, why did they not begin? They were Scribes and Pharisees, and men of pomp and circumstance and wealth and fortune and fame; why did they not begin? Why not dispense with the Nazarene?

A most beautiful picture it must have been! Jesus had healed a man sorely afflicted, and the man out of whom the devils were departed besought Jesus that He might be with him, for he felt so lonely if Jesus but turned His back upon him for one moment. But Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and say how great things God hath done unto thee. And it came to pass that when Jesus was returned from bidding the dispossessed man good-bye, the people gladly received Him, for they were all waiting for Him. What a picture of expectancy; what an eager countenance; what a penetrating outlook

upon things! What will He do? when will He do it? what will be the effect of it? They were all waiting. You know what expectancy is in a crowd; you know what expectancy is in a little family circle. It is the birthday, or Christmas day or some other memorable day, and the father has promised something: he likes to be indefinite that he may awaken expectation and excite the pleasures of hope. Three or four faces are already at the window. For what are they looking? For their father, and for the size of his pockets; and one too-clever boy thinks he sees exactly what is going to be the upshot of all this waiting, and he almost tells the secret to the next boy, and would do so but for fear of his prophetic insight being eventually discredited. Look at the expectant faces: all waiting for one man, all waiting for one opening of the parcel; all life sharpened into a note of interrogation. Oh what a time of agony and hope is that! So all these people were waiting for Christ; they were full of preparedness, for the unexpected—a most self-contradictory state of experience, but a fact well known to everyone. Not one could tell what would happen, but everyone was prepared for what might happen, whatever it was. Preparation is anticipation. The mind is busy before the curtain is lifted; who will come first? what will he say? what will she be like? how will it evolve? You cannot keep these questions down. What will happen? Nobody can tell. Yet everybody thinks he can tell. To go to church without preparation, without preparedness, that is not going to church at all; that is mockery, that is hypocrisy, that is shameful evil. Not to have read a hymn, or consulted a lesson, or offered a prayer, or breathed a desire for some Pentecostal wind and flame of talking fire, that is not going to church, it is an indecency that ought to be put down. The prepared church was never disappointed. Those who have been much at the altar before coming to church always receive profit, and are always satisfied and more than satisfied with the whole service of praise, thanksgiving, and meditation.

What a picture, too, of an undivided mind! There was but one thought; only one Personality was

needed ; there was no going after other Christs, aliases or substitutes or base simulations. One heart was expected by everybody, and that heart came ; it always came when the expectation was sufficient and complete. So it was that Jesus came to the waiting world :—" When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son." If we get ready for Christ, Christ will not disappoint us. Every congregation should gather together for one purpose, and for one purpose only ; it should never admit a minor purpose ; and that purpose is to meet God, Christ, the Holy Ghost, and to see the vision of truth and light and love. And those who come with any other motive—may the Lord disappoint them and send blindness upon their folly ! It is for you to say whether you will profit by your churchgoing or not. You must not lean upon some broken crutch, you must not rest your whole weight upon some other man no better than yourself, but you must come for the living God, and cry out for Him, and pant for Him as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, and there will never be any disappointment. You were disappointed with the man, and I am glad of it ; it was thus the Lord punished your folly ; if you had been expecting Himself you would not have been disappointed. If I come to my pulpit expecting to meet my Lord, He is always there ready with the warmth, with the suggestion, with the impulse, with the prayer answered before uttered. What base talk have I heard in God's Church ! " I was rather disappointed." Fool ! what ? rather disappointed ? What did you expect, whom did you come to see, what was it you wanted ? You first disappointed your own heart, and then blame some other man for disappointing you. He who comes to seek the Lord will say at eventide, We have walked with God to-day ; the hours of this Sabbath have been all golden hours or sapphire or pure amethyst.

" They were all waiting for Him." So shall it be one day with the whole earth. The earth has always been waiting for someone, not knowing the name, and being quite unable to give expression to its own aspirations and mystic desires. What makes you uneasy to-day ? Because he has not come. Who has not come ? I do not know, but the mysterious

pronoun, the being that is always alluded to rather than specifically indicated. A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you. Has he not sent one? He has sent a hundred, but not *the* one. We are thankful for Moses and the prophets and the great singing ones, the minstrels of Israel, but I am expecting another one that shall gather them all up into a personality more majestic than any one of themselves could sustain. Are you sure he is coming? Certainly. What makes you so certain? My soul. There is an aching heart that means to prophesy, there is a broken sob that is a fragment of a song; and we know, without being able to tell psychologically and literally why, that there is another coming, always coming, must come; the circle is nearly complete, one more turning of the compasses, and it will be beautiful as the circle of a completed desire and completed love.

There has always been a great expectation of another coming one, someone who can interpret the waiting of the world; some man of rare genius who understands what it is the poor dumb world wants, and is looking about for and is quite sure will come, but does not know when he will come; he may come now, or as a thief in the night, or like a flash of lightning, or like an unforetold impression upon the soul. The isles shall wait for his law. Why cannot the isles make their own laws? They cannot; with men this is impossible. The heart knows when it has got hold of the right Bible; the soul is a critic by right of birth, by right of kinship with God. Not when it is in some frivolous and bubbling mood, but when it is its deepest and best self, most conscious of the nearness of eternity and the necessities of human nature, then in that holy, pentecostal, climacteric moment, the soul knows when it has got hold of the right psalms and the inspired prophecies. The isles are waiting for his law. Joseph of Arimathea, what waitest thou for? I wait for the coming of the kingdom of God, and whilst I am waiting I will bury this sweet Man's body in a tomb wherein never yet was man laid; that is why I am waiting. Simeon, daughter of Phanuel, what are you waiting for, both of you, the old man and the old worshipper, Anna? We wait for the consolation of Israel. When will it come? It has come

now ; we saw the Babe, and the Babe is sometimes the man, the redemption ; being interpreted, the blood that redeems. And what are you waiting for here, poor, broken, crippled, impotent man ? You have been here a long time, what are you waiting for now ? I am waiting for the moving of the waters, for at a certain season an angel comes down and touches the stream and penetrates it with healing influence, and as soon as I can get into that pool I shall be made whole ; so I am waiting, nursing my impotence, until it can be made well by the angel. We are all waiting ; every heart has its unspoken prayer ; every soul carries its unuttered liturgy or cry of despair, saying, Oh ! that it might be so, and that it might be so very soon, for I cannot bear much more ; another pressure of the burden, and I shall be overborne. But perhaps to-morrow morning will bring the key of light which is the key of deliverance. There is not a soul that is fully satisfied, but it is to be satisfied to-morrow ; it may be satisfied in the dawn, or it may have to wait until sultry midday, or it may be taxed in patience until the gathering shades of the sunset, but to-morrow it will be satisfied, or to-morrow — the other morrow, throbbing, coming, pledged, if God so will. There is a great cry going up from the broken-hearted and disappointed world, saying, Who will show us any good ?

The congregation that waits for Christ is never disappointed ; the congregation that waits for anyone but Christ ought never to be gratified. If we wait for Christ, He will come to us ; for He knows that we are waiting for Him, and He knows everything, He never breaks His word. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst." He is there before they are ; He only waits to be manifested, revealed, and set in concrete and unmistakable figure and emphasis ; He is there all the time. Said John the Baptist, "There standeth one among you whom ye know not ; He it is." The people had been looking to the horizon when they should have been looking at the man who was standing next to them. God is nearer than we often suppose, and His satisfactions are prepared before our desires are formulated.

What a great sentiment of wonder! What will Jesus do? Here He is, I see Him; no walk like His—oh the repose of it! He comes like a march; it is part of a procession, it is an attitude of music—sh! He is there. What will He say? what will He do? Never man spake like this Man; no one ever anticipated Him, no one could ever tell just what Jesus Christ would say: He Himself was the surprise of history, and He is the surprise of the heart every day.

“They all waited for Him.” Each with his own particular desire, or plaint, or tribute of praise. Every man in the whole multitude had his own desire which he wished to be gratified; if that desire were not gratified in his own way, it would be more than gratified in Christ’s peculiar and most generous method. He does things better than we can do them; let Him have His way. Burn the barriers down; burn your creeds and rituals and ordinances and imaginations and prejudices—to the fire! Then when the ashes have cooled at your feet Jesus will come in His own way and do His own work and satisfy the best desires of the soul. Every man has his necessity; every man unfortunately brings his own standard of judgment with him. The man who thinks he knows something about literature, and therefore disproves his own claim, wants Christ to come to him in a very highly artistic method; and the Son of God will not practise aesthetics or any literary antics in order to please that particular pedant, He will drive him back to the field to feed what swine are fools enough to accept the trough at his hands. And another will accept Christ only in the degree in which he is satisfied according to some whim or prejudice or some fantastic intellectualism of his own; he will have God melted into fluent lead, and have the Almighty thrown into the moulds of his own human imagination; and the Lord will not have it. “To this man will I look, to the man that is of a broken and a contrite heart, and that trembleth at My word.”

Waiting is prayer. If we might enlarge the application of the text we might quote such passages as, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength”; “Wait patiently for Him.” There is a

waiting which we have to do, and there is a waiting which God will conduct after His own method. We wait for Christ, and Christ waits for us. And they say, in the old, old time they say, He waits to be gracious, to give Himself away in love, in the generosity that does not keep back its own blood. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are they who wait upon the Lord according to His own will, for they shall never be disappointed. Blessed are they who have been enabled by redeeming and sanctifying grace to suspend their own judgment and accept the wisdom of God, to kill their own little whims and prejudices and sectarian infallibilities, and lie down at the feet of Jesus, saying, Christ, Thy will be done!

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

“That minister must needs spend upon the stock that hath no comings in from a constant trade in his study. If the nurse doth not feed, and that more than another, she may soon bring herself and child into a consumption ; as we would not therefore see the souls that hang on our breasts languish for want of milk, or ourselves faint in our work, let us endeavour our recruits be suitable to our expense. Study and pray, pray and study again. Think not your work is done for all the week when the Sabbath is past.”—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

“I highly value common knowledge, and would not encourage any to set light by it ; but I value the saving of souls more. That work, which is our great end, must be done, whatever be left undone. It is a very desirable thing for a physician to have thoroughly studied his art, and to be able to see the reason of his practice, and to resolve such difficult controversies as are before him ; but if he had the charge of a hospital, or lived in a city where the pestilence was raging, if he would be studying the principles of fermentation, or the circulation of the blood, and similar useful points, when he should be visiting his patients and saving men’s lives—if he should even turn them away, and let them perish, and tell them he has not time to give them advice, because he must follow his own studies, I should consider that man as a most preposterous student, who preferred the means before the end of his studies ; indeed, I should think him but a civil kind of murderer. Men’s souls may be saved without knowing whether God did predetermine the creature in all its acts—whether the understanding necessarily determines the will—whether God works grace in a physical or in a moral way of causation—what free-will is—whether God has *scientiam mediam*, or positive decrees, *de malo culpæ*, and a hundred similar questions, which are probably the things you would be studying when you should be saving souls. Get well to heaven, and help your people thither, and you shall know all these things in a moment, and a thousand more, which now, by all your studies, you can never know ; and is not this the most expeditious and certain way to knowledge ?”—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

“The great bell of Moscow is too large to be hung—the question arises, what was the use of making it ? Some preachers are so learned that they cannot make themselves understood, or else cannot bring their minds to preach plain gospel sermons ; here, too, the same question might be asked.”—*Spurgeon*.

[*Thursday Morning, 22nd June, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALmighty GOD, we thank Thee for the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name and by whose grace we have access to the foot of Thy throne. We have heard the music of His voice, we rejoice in the tenderness of His tone and in the nobleness of His example, and we humbly pray Thee for the Holy Ghost that we may obey His new law and carry it out to its utmost fulfilment. We did not know what Thy law was until we heard Jesus Christ Himself expound it and displace it; we knew not in what vernal fulness we had been living until Jesus Christ made our early spring into noonday summer. Who can tell what is hidden in the earth until the June sun comes? no more can we tell what is hidden in our own hearts until the Sun of Righteousness arises upon us with healing in His wings. The light makes all things new; the light is a second creator: may our hearts be so warmed by the brooding of the Holy Ghost that they shall bring forth to ripeness all the purpose of God written in our original constitution. We pray for the deeper manhood, the redeemed and spiritual nature, that we may stand clothed in all its strength and adorned with all its beauty. We have read Thy law and misunderstood it, and turned back upon it in hostility and resentment because its discipline overbore us and exacted too much from our indolence and reluctance; but now that it is interpreted to us in the Gospel it becomes a new law; there is still a yoke, but it is easy; there is still a burden, but it is light; we can do all things through the enabling Christ. For His grace we pray; for all the power and pathos of His great Cross we supplicate Thee at this moment, that herein we may find Thine own idea of our manhood and rise at Thy bidding and cast away from us all that is elementary and enter into the fullest inheritance of Thy decree.

If the King will hear us, other attention will not be withheld.
Amen.

CXCII.

FULFILMENT.

"Not to destroy, but to fulfil."—MATT. v. 17.



NOTHING is easier than to destroy. There is no genius in it, there is nothing really heroic in it. Any beast in the meadow can crush a daisy; no angel in heaven could set the little daisy on its feet again. The danger of so-called infidelity or unbelief or misbelief is that it has the easiest kind of work to do. There is nothing difficult about unsettling the human mind. Almost any man can render it difficult for any other man really to believe. There is where doubt or unbelief has an immense advantage over certitude and faith. This should be thought of when we are tempted to reject the old word and to take up with some novel and differing expression. We are tempted by novelty; sometimes we mistake novelty for originality; but nothing that is merely novel lives long. Novelty is about the shortest-lived insect that flutters in the sunbeam. When we are most truly original we are most squarely and surely founded upon the law and the prophets, the historical, the olden, the moss-grown.

A very necessary caution was this on the part of the Divine Speaker. Said He, in effect: Probably the first thought that will occur to your mind is that I am a mere iconoclast, a breaker-up of old letters and old forms; you will regard me as a revolutionist in the most reckless sense of that term; I expect to be scoffed at upon that ground; but, believe me, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil; the summer does not come to destroy the spring, but to make fruits of its blossoms; it is even so that I, the Son of Man, have come; I destroy nothing in the olden time, I expand it, carry it through natural sequence

and evolution, and bring it to perfectness of beauty and application to the immediate life of the day. How strong His position was! He claims the old garden, the old roots, everything that was primordial, He will have nothing that is merely novel; He came up from eternity, and to eternity He will return. The New Testament is not new in the sense in which this morning is new or something is new which was never heard of before. Unfortunately we have only one English word for new; we use it or abuse it just according to the mood of the moment or the exigencies of convenience. It was not so in our Lord's language; new had a larger meaning, it was a word of fulfilment and culmination, bringing things up to their most modern application from their most incalculable metaphysics. If you are wrong metaphysically you will never be right in what you falsely call practical matters. The only truly practical is the profoundly metaphysical. It is often a long time in coming to the surface, and in some of its first words it hesitates and divides and distinguishes and distributes its thought into various sections requiring the acutest vigilance and the most complete analysis to get at their finest meanings; but all the time king Metaphysic has been coming up from the morning of unbeginning time and has been trying to incarnate itself in what we call the practical. We misuse that word: few of us really understand the practical; when it is right and beneficent it is the incarnation of the metaphysical.

Jesus Christ here gives us the secret of every great ministry. We shall never be great preachers if we only discourse upon the topics of the day. He has a poor text who has only the latest anecdote of an evening newspaper. That is not preaching to the times, that is making a livelihood out of lies. He preaches to the times who preaches from eternity. Jesus Christ did not displace the law and the prophets, He will talk with both of them upon a mountain by-and-by; they three—law, prophet, Redeemer—will meet and reveal the unity of things. The secret of a great ministry is that it founds itself upon the original, the primordial, the initial; its great speech is *ab initio*, coming up with dews of heaven's first and only morn-

ing upon it. That is preaching. He who speaks to our original intuitions, instincts, our first plasm of a constitution and divine purpose—he is a great teacher, preacher, herald, and prophet of God. Jesus Christ did not discourse upon things that were lying upon the surface. If He took up a lily, He found it in the heart of God and plucked it thence for a moment that He might show it to us and then set it back again for our own delight when we came to think of the deeper problems of Providence. Jesus began at Moses—there is no real beginning that does not take upon itself that ancient date—and He proceeded to the Psalms—there is no preaching complete unless it be a preaching of song and music, with a tremulous cadence in it and a most tender note, almost suppressed, but only suppressed because of its very greatness. And all the prophets are in the true teaching. The prophets were not fortune-tellers, they were seers, readers of the far-off horizon, interpreters of the plasm of the present into the fulness and completeness of the remotest future.

If we follow Jesus therefore we shall hear wonderful speaking. Never man spake like this Man! The mystery often is that He spoke so simply, and yet His simplicity was unfathomable in its meaning; it was the last expression of eternity; it was God's vision or God's revelation brought up to the point of this morning's cool glittering dew. Great things have they heard who have sat at the feet of Jesus, things they can never forget, things they can never explain, yet those things fill their life as the ether fills the universe. We will attempt to establish and elucidate our points by passing here and there along the gleaming line of our Lord's wondrous expositions.

Take, for example, His doctrine respecting worship. That doctrine was taught to one hearer. Jesus Christ never kept anything for great assemblies. We keep our little essays for the principal meeting. Ah me! what wonder we are buried so cheaply and so instantaneously forgotten! Jesus revealed the great doctrine of true spiritual worship to one hearer, and she was a woman. The women said all the most beautiful things that are to be found in Scripture, and

the things were the more beautiful that the women knew nothing about their beauty. They were words wrung out of agony. Agony is always eloquent. Jesus Christ did not rebuke people for worshipping in special localities ; He had Himself, in the council of the Godhead, indicated localities in which worship was to be instituted and enjoyed:—In this place, we read, at this altar, where my name is recorded. These are local and localising expressions: Jesus came not to destroy the local, but to fulfil it, and, fulfilling it, He said to this wondering woman, daughter of darkness but yet to be daughter of light, The hour cometh and now is when neither in this mountain nor at Jerusalem shall ye exclusively or specially worship the Father ; ye shall worship Him on every mountain and in every valley ; hear me ! God is a Spirit. How new ! yet how old ! how original ! and yet how quiet with the spirit of eternal peacefulness ! Woman, God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth ; the Father seeketh such to worship Him : you can pray in your country, and the Jew can pray in his country, and all the nations of the earth shall be sanctuaries of the one Father, and from the universal heart there shall go up one cry of desire and one shout of praise. What a revolution ! how great is this Son of Man ! When did He contract history or reduce it by subtraction to some meaner expressiveness ? When did He fail to open the bud and show the full flower ? If He had destroyed the local notion of prayer He would have created an immense prejudice ; He accepted it, enlarged it, glorified it by fulfilment and completion.

So must we do when we go abroad to the pagans. We must not destroy their books. They are written in strange characters ; we should sit down beside the heathen suppliants and ask about the alphabet and the combination of the letters, and the meaning of the holy literature. Then, having so far approached the confidence of the pagan suppliants, we might drop a hint or two of the larger religion, of the prayers that are not written and cannot be written ; we should refer to the heart-prayers, the great cries of the distressed and aspiring soul. Thus we should

not destroy the heathen literature, but fulfil it in all the particulars in which it is possible of fulfilment in consonance with the purpose of God. And so we should do with the moralist. He has his little apophthegms, the moralist has his pocket-bible of proverbs. Most of these proverbs are only partly true, but we should recognise the part that is true, and carry out that part until it covers the whole area of the man's mind. We shall do nothing by condemning his proverbs and spurning his little books and divers efforts after the service of man and the perfection of the race. We must begin where we can, at the first vital point, and carry up that point by the grace and Spirit of God, and show that all things beautiful and true and musical come from the same fount, the well of heaven.

We might, secondly, illustrate this text from the more concrete point of what is known as beneficence or good-doing. Good-doing can be found in some form in nearly all the lands and all the ages. The Jew, under the providence of God and by the inspired instruction of Moses, got some way on his journey towards the true goal or complete idea of divine good-doing. The Jew was astounded when he was told that he had to pay courteous attention to the stranger who was spending the week-end with him; he was amazed to paleness when he was told that he was not greedily to pluck every grape and every olive and every ear of corn, but was to leave something on purpose for the stranger, the fatherless, the widow. That was the culminating point of beneficence? It was not; it took Jesus to carry that philanthropy to a higher point. There is my Lord's deity, that He carries all these lower planets to a completer solar glory. What could there be possibly beyond the stranger, the fatherless, the widow? These persons might all be inoffensive, poor, harmless creatures. If, Isaac or Jacob, thou hast a crust thou canst not eat, throw it to the stranger; give the widow a cut off the loaf that is too much for thine own immediate hunger; they are poor, washed-out, shivering creatures; they are doing no harm; be careful about them, and ask them to partake of the crumbs that

fall from thy table. Can Christianity go beyond that? Jesus Christ went beyond it at one great stride; He said, If thine enemy hunger, feed him; love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you. The Jew thought he had advanced to the very final step in the march of civilisation when he gave something to the inoffensive stranger, to the harmless widow and orphan; but Jesus says, If thine enemy hunger, feed him; love thine enemy: go to the positive aspect of thy poor beneficence. Whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us; not whilst we were becoming sinners, but when we had reached the very depth of our apostasy, and when we had depleted ourselves of all nervous power and all moral restorativeness, when we had lost all self-helpfulness; while we were yet sinners, the blood dripped on us, the red blood of the infinite Redemption. I am not come to destroy your little beneficences and maxims of caretaking respecting the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, but I am come to raise you to that god-likeness which is kind to the unthankful and to the evil, to that divinity of love which sheds its showers upon the atheist and the blasphemer.

We might, in the third place, illustrate the text by Jesus Christ's estimate of righteousness. He found a good deal of respectability in His day; there were many persons who were reading pious sentences and observing more or less reputable traditions; He looked abroad upon the whole mass, and having estimated all that was being done by Scribe and Pharisee and Sadducee, He said, Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and of the Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. He would not even tear to tatters the righteousness of these hypocrites; the righteousness itself might in some degree be beyond challenge; but they had mauled it and degraded it and perverted it to selfish purposes, and now Jesus Christ, recognising the righteousness of the righteous, said, Except your righteousness exceed in quality the righteousness of these holders of the seat of Moses, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. But how can we exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees? By

purification of motive, by sanctification of desire, by the regeneration of the soul, which is the final miracle of the Holy Ghost; by adding a new man, an inward man, a man renewed after the power of the Holy Ghost; in this way your least attempt at righteousness should exceed all the pomps and ceremonious endeavours to cover up hypocrisy by what would be regarded as obvious respectability.

And Jesus Christ, in the fourth place, said, You must enlarge your conceptions of the world; of course it was right that you begin with this little place which you call your own land. If there was anything in the world which Jesus Christ was not it was a patriot. A patriot was a very small but frequently a somewhat necessary person. Jesus Christ was not a patriot. Jesus Christ was a philanthropist, a man-lover, a world-redeemer. And beautiful it is to mark the evolution of this thought in the apostolic missionary service. Peter expressed it all when he said, "I perceive"—a marvellous word! the shades fall off my eyes; I see the horizon is larger than I thought it was; I thought that we should build in the Church within a given number of lines and call it the Church and regard all else as outsiders, outlanders, but "I perceive"—a new thought comes into my mind like a new star in the darkness; I see it, it is so; "I perceive that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him." That is vision; that is illumination. I perceive, said Peter, that God is no respecter of persons; I had a dream erewhile, it must have been a nightmare, it must have been a dream from below, not a vision from on high; I see, I perceive, I know it that God is no respecter of persons. Another and greater Apostle said over all these divisions and arrangements of sects and grades and positions and environment, O soul of mine, know thee that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, barbarian nor Scythian; the whole world lies in the bosom of the Infinite Love. This is what Jesus Christ did for men. I wonder that all men do not love Him. He made us men; He is our creator, not in the original sense only, but in the following and evolutionary sense of giving us larger manhood and larger liberties and larger access

to Himself. A great day it was when the mighty Paul took all these divisions and little classifications, in which we so much indulge our paltry vanity and in which we display our foolish cleverness—when he took them all up and threw them out of the church-window, and left any dog outside, who was base enough, to assimilate such food and turn it to its proper uses. In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, barbarian, Scythian, bond, free. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and the circumcision is not of the knife, but of the consenting love. I say again that I wonder that all men do not rush into the open arms of Jesus and magnify Him in every respect. Yet His name is often cast out, His name is sometimes a byword; there are companies in which we dare not breathe it. If any man quoted the word Jesus in the House of Commons he would be laughed at: and it is a Christian country!

And, in the last place, if you will read the law—hard, stiff reading, and equally an education and a successful examination—if you will read the law as given in the Pentateuch, you will see what Jesus Christ has done in the enlargement of men's ideas and the fulfilment of elementary discipline and proposition. We say that the Jew gave tithes. You have not read the law. One poor man, whose soul was too small to be recognised in any spiritual statistics, said, I give tithes. It was because he could not help it; and there is no giving if it is given by constraint; no man can give who does not give with love; he may part with the money, but it is no sacrifice and no service rendered to the Cross. If the tithe could do so much, what can love do? But love at present is young, love has not got all its faculties about it; the tax-gatherer can collect more by Act of Parliament than all the preachers and teachers in the world can collect by prayer. But that shall not always be so. Love, if true, is growing, it will be mighty some day; and then we shall see that though the tithe has not been done away it has been carried up into its proper consummation; it is displaced by love, all-giving love, that wondrous love which says nothing has been given whilst anything has been withheld. And what does God want from us? Our money,

a portion of our time, a little of our patronage given under the designation of influence? Nothing of the kind. God seeks not yours, but you; having got you, He has got yours. That is the great speech I hear. To seek yours is to beg for a dole, to seek you is to get all you are, all you have. We have great battles, Jesus and I, about this. I have kept back part, I have thought it was too much. The most beautiful of women, to me, came from this church after hearing a great missionary preach, and she said, as I have written in my forthcoming autobiography, "My dear, you must give that man one hundred pounds, and give it at once." I—unpardonable wretch!—compounded with the woman, and sent him fifty pounds. But, as I say in pages I have just been preparing for the press, I must pay the other fifty pounds in some form, some day, because she said it—and what has my Lord said? The same thing; and it must be done.

[*Sunday Morning, 2nd July, 1899.*]

Prayer.

THE earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and Thine also is the fulness of the sea. There is nothing that has not Thine heart in it ; everything is sacred unto the Lord, for He made it, and the whole universe is consecrated by His breath and His smile. Teach us that there is now no unholy ground, for Jesus Christ has been here, and His footprints have made the whole earth more sacred than any temple built by man. We rejoice to think that all things testify to Thy presence and to Thy goodness, to Thy daily care, and to Thy redeeming love. Thou hast not bought us back with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, known to us under the figure of a lamb, and a lamb slain from before the foundation of the earth. We do not understand this, our hearts feel it, our penitence answers it ; behold, this is an everlasting Gospel, too large almost for the duration of eternity. Oh the depth of the riches of Thy love ! who can measure its height or its breadth ? who can lay a line upon the whole compass thereof ? In this love we stand, for by this love we are saved, and our destiny is ennobled and secured. We have heard of the precious blood, the blood of the heart, the outstreaming of the love, the red river of sorrow. On the Cross our Saviour triumphed ; His defeat was His victory, and because Jesus died and rose again we also shall rise with Him and be where He is. This is a great mystery ; we bless Thee for a love too mysterious to be comprehended, an ineffable, overflowing, everlasting love, that contemns all the ambition of words and proceeds in return to the throne whence it came. We are now by faith in sight of the Cross ; behold, it is a wondrous scene ; such love and sorrow never met before ; this is the redemption wrought by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Here we see the meaning of sin, now we understand somewhat of the greatness of man ; all this was done that no man might be lost. Thou who couldst shake the universe from Thy fingers as the wind might shake the dew from the bushes dost die for the universe that has stained itself with guilt. Herein is love ! We cannot follow it, we cannot express it, but we feel it, and under the mighty impulse of gratitude we can suffer all things and do all things, for God is love. Thou didst create the earth, and drown the earth, and love the earth, and Thou wilt in Christ Jesus save the earth, and set it back in the household of the stars, a returned and welcomed prodigal. Amen.

CXCIII.

CREATED !

"God created the earth."—GEN. i. 1.



OME words do not terminate in themselves. "Created" is only the first syllable in an infinitely greater word. What if at the end it should turn out that all the words expressive of power, wisdom, love, care, should be run into one grand vocable? We are only struggling with the individual syllables, and we cannot put them together yet in the massive word which is as the Logos. What little child would stop in the middle of a large polysyllable thinking that he had reached the end of it? He knows well enough that he is only struggling with a very great task; by the time he has reached the fourth syllable he has forgotten two of the other three, and he returns renewing the struggle bravely, but quite sure all the time that he is reading or trying to read only one long word. That is just what we are doing. Of course we think we are doing something other and something grander, but we are not. We are still busy with the Word of God, the Logos, the Word out of which all other words true and good are cut, the Word which is broken up into millions of syllables which we cannot pile up into one massive and solemn utterance. Well for us if we know that we are adding one little syllable to another, and well for us if no meddlesome person shall interfere with us in the process, endeavouring to make us believe that the beginning is the middle and the middle is the end, and that anyone can get to the end successfully without arduous stress and effort. There are many thieves and robbers on the road; they want to persuade us to give up the pursuit of the Word; they tell us that we have toiled quite long enough at that fruitless task; they would hasten us or dis-

courage us or perplex us or do anything that would detach us from this profound study of the profound Word.

The word "created," therefore, I repeat, is but the first syllable of all the words that belong to it, and they a million thick, squared and cubed by other millions up to the point of infinity. Yet there are certain little literary personalities, which I will not dignify by the name of imps, who try to persuade us that "created" is a complete word. They would go further and have us believe that "created" is a dictionary word. The dictionary can never interpret the Bible: dictionary and Bible are not synonymous terms; grammar and inspiration are not coequal. The Church will be a long time in understanding this, for the Church has made an idol of grammar; it has gone so far as to spell grammar with a capital G: there is no telling what the Church will do when drunk with bad wine! Revelation is not a letter; it is a spirit. And preaching is not an effort, it is a breathing; and with that sweet balmy breath there comes peace, the peace which passeth all understanding. We have on one or two occasions briefly studied what we have termed the implication of words; that is to say, there are certain words which have a dozen other words within them or necessary to them, following them, interpreting and completing them, and until we connote and thoroughly relate such implied words with the central term, the central term remains but a verbal cloud that will bewilder and darken our life.

God not only created the world, He drowned the world, and in Sodom and Gomorrah He typically burned the world, and in John He so loved the world as to redeem it with blood: all this is implied in the word "create." We must break create as a word up into its constituent particles or elements; it is a multitudinous word, a verbal host, a countless throng of ideas, suggestions, encouragements, responsibilities. Sometimes we are asked if we can find the Evangelical Gospel in the Book of Genesis. My answer is, We not only find it in the Book of Genesis, which is the richest Book in all Scripture, but we find it in the very first sentence in the Book of Genesis. We find

the whole Evangelical Gospel in the word "created." To create is to redeem. The Cross is in the heart of create. Granted that God created the world, we have no difficulty about its redemption; the one follows the other. To create, to redeem, are syllables in the same word—the most massive word, high as heaven, deeper than the rocks on which we stand. So I have no difficulty about finding the Gospel in the very first line of the very first verse of the very first book of the Bible, and that red line of redeem, crimson, runs through the book, giving it colour, pathos, significance, final and adequate interpretation and meaning. If God created the world He will also rule it. God does not create worlds in order that meaner spirits may control them. Creation means providence, and providence means redemption, and redemption means heaven, and heaven is a term which no lexicography can fitly define. They say we must die to know it. What of that? The sooner the better; we long for the light; we sigh for the morning of our dreams and hopes: let it come!

God drowned the world. He therefore in creating the world reserved His own rights. God is not a prodigal, a wastrel, creating stars and spending them on a fool's counter for a fool's enjoyment. He watches every blade of grass and numbers every grain of sand, and the very hairs of our head are all numbered, as if they were of consequence, as if the loss of one poor filament might affect the infinite heart. All this is implied in the word "created." Whatever is necessary to complete creation God will assuredly perform: if it be drowning, the world shall be drowned; if burning and fire and brimstone, the world shall be calcined, and out of the ashes thereof there shall stand forth the completed grand purpose of God.

All history has shown us the failure of mere punishment. Drowning did not kill sin; fire and brimstone cannot cleanse guilt; there must come another catharism, another way of getting at the uncleanness and removing it, and that other way is the way of Calvary, the way of the Cross, the mystery of blood. So many people are inclined to misinterpret this

holy word blood. My friends, there is a butcher's blood, and there is a poet's blood. Why vulgarise the mighty costly redemption by attaching to its central word blood some vulgar meaning, as if it were a beast's heart that had been cut up for the satisfaction of some ravenous wolf? Get to the higher side of things; read the Bible poetically, ideally, spiritually; read it according to the meaning of its soul, and you will see that atonement by blood is an idea which never could have occurred to mortal man, but which belongs to the thoughts of God.

God created the earth, God destroyed the earth by drowning, God burned the earth with fire, and after all these processes we come to John iii. 16, "God loved the world." Love is a bigger word than create. Love will never give up the world. It is given to love to save the whole earth. The Church may be negligent or selfish or penurious, it may be guilty of faithlessness in regard to the solemn oath and covenant; and yet the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God. We can do nothing against the truth but for the truth. How long has God loved the world? From eternity. Before the world was it was loved. Every star is a thought; the world is an idea; it was in the Word, the Logos, countless ages before it swung its little censer round what we call the sun. God's love is eternal; God redeemed the world before He created it; the Lamb is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. These are great mysteries. A religion without mystery is an earth without a sky. Imagine the wretched thing! That is unthinkable, if we are to use so made-up a word in the expression of our higher conceptions and most solemn decisions about things. With me it is not that God is unthinkable, but that the earth without Him is unthinkable, inconceivable. The Christian faith has its agnosticisms, but they are not of that mean intellectual brood which suffices itself by closing its eyes and its ears, and saying that it knows nothing. True! such a beast cannot know. He only knows who loves.

Then love includes punishment. It was love that drowned the world, it was love that burned the

world; it was love that lacerated your back and made the red stream flow over your spine when you stooped to do the devil's work. It is love that chastises us, and love that chastens us; if we be without chastening, we are not God's dear sons. Chastening is a proof alike of providence and redemption; for education is a great process, and it includes the rod. I do not object to the rod if I am quite sure about the hand that wields it.

We might now reverse the process. Instead of saying, God created, destroyed, redeemed, loved, we might say loved, redeemed, destroyed, created. This is one of the great words that reads the same backwards as forwards. There are a few such words in the English language. We have sometimes struggled to make a sentence of words that read backward and forward in identically the same way. When we have constructed that sentence we shall be able to begin at the end and go back to the beginning, to begin at the beginning and go to the end, and all will be the same. It is so with God's great processes and ministries. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Is that the end? Yes. Is it only the end? It is the beginning as well as the end. God destroyed or punished the world. Is that an intermediate process? Certainly not; it is a continual process, making itself felt throughout the development of the whole economy of human life and human institutions. God is never at rest. There is no heart that has not its own sorrow. My only joy is in my misery; for the time being, to hug it, kiss it, love it, fondle it, that is joy. So the grave may become the sunniest spot in all the acreage of the life. To have so lived as to find your chief joy in your chief misery is to have lived according to a very profound and tender law of human development. But how can we go from redemption through destruction to creation? That is the very process through which God is conducting us. All the time God is creating the earth. Do not imagine that creation is a separate and final act; it is God's inclusive ministry. Whatever He does is an aspect of creation, formation, culture, development, and ultimate sanctification, and

crowning with the bays and garlands of the heavenly paradise. God is creating man. There is an elementary sense in which man was created countless centuries ago: there is a spiritual sense in which man is being created every day. "Ye must be born again" is the gospel of every sunrise; every day is birthday. We are born into a higher life, a nobler conception, a fuller manhood. How long it will take God to create the world we cannot tell. In a rough outline way He took six days to it long ago, whatever the meaning of the word days may be; for "day" is a word which no dictionary can explain. God took what we may term a measurable period within which to create in the first instance, but He has to fill up the outline, He has to develop every seed, bring every tree to its proper fulness of meaning, lift up every child and every soul to its high intent, according to the measure of His love. How long will it take Him to do this? With God a thousand years are as one day. He must take His own time, but He is going to make a jewel of this world so large, so brilliant, so precious, that it will be worth every century God spends upon it. God will not waste an hour, much less a century. As soon as the earth is made meet for its Master's use according to the original Divine intent, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, that God saw it was very good.

At what period of this process are we standing? Some of us are standing at the period of chastisement. We are being drowned or we are being burned, we are being sorely smitten or utterly desolated; but God has promised that He will see that a remnant remains out of which He will grow the flower of immortality. Oh that I could comfort you! but I cannot just now; I dare not write to any soul that has lost its companion soul; so I may be thought to be negligent or unsympathetic; it is because I am neither the one nor the other, but I cannot write to my friends or offer them stones for bread. Yet underneath all this there is the assurance that a remnant, how small soever, shall be left, and out of that remnant, seedling, or bud shall be grown a great tree, a most beautiful flower, or what God Himself may determine as the issue and outcome.

A dear friend of many years' comradeship has sent me what you see on my right hand in the pulpit, this garden of roses, to signalise the beginning of the thirty-first year of my pastorate of this church. I never dreamed that love would have thought of so precious and so acceptable a gift. Each rose in this great bank of glory is a gospel or a separate face that looks lovingly at me, and every whiff of fragrance comes from beyond the river, the other side Jordan, where the roses do not fade and do not shed their leaves. This is part of the Divine process. God is creating me. The first old Adam has to be taken wholly out of my nature. God may have to reduce me, if I may speak parabolically, to mere cellular tissue that cannot stand up of itself, and yet which, laid on the table, has in it the form and image of a man. God has to reduce us to that cellular tissue type, and to take out of us every nerve and bone and muscle and tendon and drop of black blood until the whole is made after the pattern of His own idea ; and then He will begin to fill up and fill in and nourish and cultivate us and bring us from strength to strength by the power of the Cross and by the might of the Holy Ghost until at last we stand up a man. Do not interfere with the Divine mystery, but co-operate, how feebly soever, with God.

[*Thursday Morning, 13th July, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, all things are done according to Thy purpose. The Lord reigneth. It is not our doing, or the doing of this man or that man, who knows nothing as to what he is doing ; it is the carrying-out of an eternal purpose, the shining of a sun that has been veiled through eternal ages. May we believe that we are living under a dispensation of Providence, that all things are ordered and settled and determined ; the bounds of our habitation are fixed ; there is an appointed time to man upon the earth ; the very hairs of our head are all numbered. May we not listen to frivolous readers of the times, to the men who come and go, and to the tongues that wag in license and sometimes in blasphemy ; may we hear what the Lord our God will say, may we diligently consider the Holy Scriptures, and hide ourselves in the tabernacle of the Infinite Wisdom. Shake our faith in all accidents and surprises and stale novelties, and carry us back with a feeling of solemn pathos to the written Word, where every man's light is shining and his destiny set forth. Keep us always at the Cross, the Saviour's Cross, the Cross that turns our way into a sacrament and our suffering into a joy.

The Lord hear us when we pray at the Cross, and the Lord be pleased to turn that Cross into a grand Amen.

CXCIV.

COMPLETING PASSAGES.

"Another scripture saith."—JOHN xix. 37.



HE "other scripture" may not contradict the one that has been already quoted; the other scripture may expand it, complete it, may be the hemisphere needed to complete the globe. This is a lesson in Bible-reading. We are not to stop just where we please; it is no business of ours to pick out favourite texts and found fantastic theories or mutable denominations upon them. The Scripture is a whole; every verse belongs to every other verse. Sometimes a text may be singular; that is to say, may be the only text of the kind in the whole Scripture. Yet, though brief, it may be pregnant, it may be a condensed revelation; it may be Biblical, that is to say, charged with the very spirit of the Bible, though it has no solitary parallel passage. These considerations show us how careful, and even critical, and sometimes even suspicious we should be in reading detached portions of Scripture. Always attend to the "again"; never forget the "another"; collate, bring into vital relation, all the passages bearing upon any given subject. When you have made the collation complete, then you may begin, though you had better never begin, to build your theories and to suggest your conjectures. This is a very critical business; men should fight very shy of this kind of work; it leads to literalism in too many cases, to pedantry in some cases, and to a miserable prophecy of interpretation which is forbidden, inasmuch as revelation brings with it the impartiality of the sun and the impartiality of the living air. We could quote passages of Scripture and be utterly unbiblical in our teaching. Who is there who cannot quote a text in support of his favourite hymn or most popular and remunerative prejudice? Quotation may be

falsification. It is not enough to have a text, we must have the whole Bible in that text or be able to complete it into a Bible by the collation of other texts which signify the same grand truth, and mayhap present it in divers colours.

You could take the text, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth," and you could by that one text destroy a great portion of the Scriptural revelation and testimony. Charity is to be a thing absolutely speechless, no hint is to be given that we have done anything beneficial, gentle, helpful: here is the passage which distinctly says so; that you may have no difficulty about it I will quote it again: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing"; however multitudinous the charities of the right hand, the left hand must be kept behind, out of sight. Why dispute this? here is the text; here is our plain authority; we have nothing to do but obey. All this would seem to be reasonable and Scriptural: whereas it is neither the one nor the other, because another scripture saith, "Let your light so shine before men that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven." The one passage does not destroy the other; there is no mutual cancelling, but there is expansion, explanation, a different standard and a fuller suggestion. If, on the other hand, a man were to say, All life is to be lived in the blaze of noonday; everything we do has to be seen, estimated, and represented in plain and undeniable figures; every pound has to be set down as twenty shillings, and every gift has to be registered in some official report or schedule;—that would not be a true reading of the Scripture; hearing any man making that testimony, we should be entitled to say, Another scripture saith, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." What, then, is to be done? Bring the passages together; let them be mutually explanatory; neither overlook the one nor the other: in this way we come into possession of the mind of the Spirit, and in this way, and in this way only, do we become profoundly and beneficently Biblical.

You may quote a passage and say, There can be no

doubt as to the absolute secrecy of true religion ; for this passage is continually before the eyes of my mind : " When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door pray to thy Father which is in secret." There should be no public worship, no common prayer, no one should ever know that any other man has ever prayed. Here is the text ; our duty is simply to obey : have a room set apart for private worship ; when you go into it tell no man of your entrance : when you are within the holy place be sure to shut the door, and shut out even your own dearest friends, shut out even your loving, clinging children ; pray without anybody suspecting that you ever have prayed : here is the scripture, I give you chapter and verse, and we must not depart from the living Word. My answer is, The passage is correctly quoted, most undoubtedly our Blessed One, Lord and Head of the Church, did say, " When thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret " ; but another scripture saith, " Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together ; pray for one another ; be helpers of each other's prayers." These are the other and comforting, not the cancelling or contradictory scriptures ; they must be brought into relation and studied in their unity ; there is a plain duty indicated in each of the scriptures, and the one duty is not to be exercised at the expense of the other or in contempt of the other. There is a common prayer, a great fellowship intercession, a grand gathering of penitents and heart-broken people, mingling their tears, uttering their common expectation, besieging with simultaneous violence the condescending throne and graciously forcing Omnipotence to break into tears of pity. So we must put the scriptures together ; we must not build upon either one or the other. We might quote a scripture to prove that worship is to be public, " Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is " : you cannot begin to pray until you all get together, you must be congregations, and led by appointed leaders, and pursuing an indicated and inflexible curriculum of prayer and praise and study and ascription ; all must be done in the common name and in the national name. Again, another scripture saith, " Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet,

and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly." Do not be partly Biblical ; never be literally textual ; see the poetry of every blade of grass, read the ideality of every morning sunbeam ; regard with thankfulness the magnitude and the brilliance of God's total sanctuary and God's completed universe.

We are the servants of the Prince of peace. The Scripture says so ; our great Lord is called the Prince of peace. There is to be no controversy, no war, no contention and conflict ; the weak are to submit to the strong, the nervous are to give way to the courageous, and the strong-minded and the high-handed are to have everything their own way. This must be so, for our Lord's name is Prince of peace. Disband your armaments, burn your navies or commercialise them ; for we are living under the white banner of the Prince of peace ; it is a broad silken banner, all spotlessly white, except the letters of the Name, and those letters are written in red, mayhap in blood, and they look well on that white ground. You have proved your position by a text, but you forget that another scripture saith, "I came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword." You must complete the name of the Prince by the testimony and declaration of the Prince Himself. Christianity means battle, controversy, conflict ; out ! to the war ! and let the laggard stay at home to wash the clothes he is not worthy to wear. God in the person of His Son called us to be soldiers, good soldiers ; the mightiest of the leaders under Christ said, I have fought a good fight ; I was never wanting where the war was raging, and if the standard must fall from my nerveless grasp it shall fall without sign or taint of cowardice in my heart. Both the scriptures are right ; each has its proper place and its proper meaning : what we have to do is to collate both the passages, set them together, study them in their unity, see how they really belong to one another, and interlap and overlap one another ; for the Word of God cannot be broken, and what appear to us to be fractions are only odd figures seeking the other figures that they may be completed integers.

You say you have no patience with the incapable and the unfortunate and those who are always too late for the tide, and you quote as your favourite scripture, which keeps your hand tight over your pelf, "Every man shall bear his own burden." That is the plain teaching of Scripture; there cannot be any possible mistake about that. "Every man shall bear his own burden"; no other man is to interfere with that burden, no matter what it is or how it became a heavy load; we must take things as they are, and if I am doomed to carry no burden and another man is doomed to carry a very heavy burden, well, there is the plain scripture, you cannot get out of it; all I can do when I pass the man who is carrying a very heavy load is to quote the scripture to him, crush him with a text, "Every man shall bear his own burden"—good morrow! Yet again another scripture saith, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Ease the man's load a little, say to him, Come, I am stronger than you, at least for the present moment; let me share your load; and see how broad-shouldered I am, I can carry that weight quite easily, and you shall take a rest, have a breathing space, and if you want to know my authority for proposing this kind of service to you, well, the scripture saith, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Sometimes you share a burden by speaking one word of sympathy to the burden-bearer; sometimes you divide the load simply by recognising it, and by saying in pathetic tones, My brother, friend, it is a heavy weight, it is indeed a most crushing burden; I wonder you are able to bear it. And he will reply, Yet again another scripture saith, I can do all things through Christ enabling me; my sorrow is my joy; that I am carrying this load for Christ is the song of the week, the star that burns away the darkness of the night.

So then we come to the collation and parsing of Scripture, the mutual interpretation of divers texts, some of them apparently contradictory; and yet that which may not subject itself to easy interpretation of grammar and lexicon may be reconciled and built into a great solemn meaning by the magical worker Experience. We know some things simply by living

them. The teacher can never make the scholar a gentleman; he must be born of God to be gentle. The schoolmaster can inform him, correct his errors, extend his knowledge, but that peculiar magical thing, gentlemanliness, the highest life, the most perfect and gracious refinement, why, this is a grace taught but in one school, the school of the Holy Ghost. If not so taught, it is simulation, veneer, a calculated attitude, not the outbreathing and the outgoing of a truly regenerated and divinely inspired character.

Jesus Christ was murdered; I can give you chapter and verse for that fact; the Scripture is very clear about it; the horrible words are these: "They led Him away to a place called Calvary, and there they killed Him," crucified Him, murdered Him. He was overborne by rough strength, He was one against many; the many rushed upon Him and trampled Him under foot; they nailed Him to the tree, and they slew the Lord that taught the people and helped them in divers ways: Christ of Nazareth was a murdered man. The text seems to say so, I do not dispute the accuracy of your quotation; but again another scripture saith, "I lay down my life; no man taketh it from Me." It was not a murder, it was a Sacrifice: it was not an assassination, it was an Atonement. "No man taketh it from Me; I lay down My life; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." This is the higher reading. Undoubtedly from the merely human point of view it was a Jewish murder or a Roman crucifixion, an infamous cruelty; but never forget the other and interpreting scripture: I lay down My life, no man taketh it from Me; I could scorch these murderers with lightning, I could leave them hot cinders on a ground that would yield them no honourable grave: thinkest thou not that I could pray to My Father, and He would send Me twelve legions of angels? I am not one only, I am not left alone; the resources of the universe are at My disposal. But there is a great meaning in what is going on, and I must read that meaning, which is: I lay down My life for the sheep; no man taketh it from Me; weep not for Me, weep for yourselves; I

am not the victim of cruelty from the Divine aspect and point of view, I am the Saviour of the world; with these garments dyed red I came up from Edom and from Bozrah that I might buy the world with blood.

The ever-recurrent lesson is, Do not build upon one text, upon a solitary instance; build upon the whole testimony. The devil had his text; he said once to Jesus, Cast Thyself down from this great height, have no fear, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee; they will delight to catch Thee in their outspread arms and bind Thee to their heaving, loving bosoms; the air is full of them: why not put this text to the test? it is written—you are fond of quoting the Bible, let me quote it also—it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone; Thou art the darling of God, Thou art the radiant life of the angels; without Thee they would be solitary, swallowed up of sorrow; their great wings would be under Thee in less than the twinkling of an eye; then all the world would say that Thou art in very deed the Son of God. Jesus answered and said unto him, in effect, Yet again another scripture saith, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God; thou shalt not seduce the Almighty; thou shalt not create difficulties in order that God may extricate thee from them; thou shalt be wise, prudent, thou shalt exercise the reason and the forethought with which God has endowed thee; they are not thine, they are God's great gifts; act in the light of those gifts and in their exercise, and do not create a fantastic God or represent a fantastic piety.

Thus the Bible bears self-comparison, sharp contrast, happy mutual exposition. Do not stop at the sanguinary chapters of the introductory books of the Bible; there is no doubt much blood running in those old channels, the reading is very wearisome; who can bear to read chapter after chapter, long and elaborate, about slaughter and bloodshedding and conquest, and the extinction of tribes and of nations? Read on; hear what another scripture saith; set all these painful incidents—and never question their painfulness—in

their right light, in their historical perspective, and live thou in the light of the Divine purpose ; and whatever mystery may remain, and that mystery will remain under these cold grey skies is certain, be assured that in His own time God will explain His entire policy and vindicate His ways to men. You could stop at certain verses, and be revolted ; you could stop at certain semi-punctuations, and be atheists ; you could read from your Bible and throw it down as a book to be abhorred. That is not the right way to read it : again another scripture saith, and yet another. The next century will cast light upon this century. We are not to expect from men of the first Christian century what we expect from the men of to-day ; we are not to go back to the old periods of immemorial history and contrast the civilisation of those mythic periods with the civilisation which becomes our own evangelised age. Give God time ; give God room. O man, learn this last of the lessons, wait !

The whole of this idea is beautifully set forth in the very text and context. The appointed officers went about and brake the legs of the malefactors, and when they came to Jesus and saw that He was dead already they brake not His legs ; and they said, There is no need to break the legs of this malefactor, He is quite dead. That was their account of the matter. A poor superficial and unsatisfactory account, but the right reading of the whole was as is given in the 36th verse—"that the scripture should be fulfilled." The accident you had not long ago was that the scripture might be fulfilled. God is having His way ; His way is right and is best. The scripture vindicates itself by manifold human experience. Whilst we are looking at the Bible as a book taken out of a library, God says, Go now and read the Bible as a record of life, and read the record of life as a Bible. Not a translation, but a transmigration, an outgoing of this great book-spirit into the rugged literature of strife and tears and misery, of wedding bells, and knells that tell that the dead are going to their home. You have read the Bible as a revelation of life. Now read life as a confirmation of the Bible.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

“There is a certain majesty in plainness ; as the proclamation of a prince never frisks it in tropes or fine conceits, in numerous and well-turned periods, but commands in sober, natural expressions. A substantial beauty, as it comes out of the hands of Nature, needs neither paint nor patch ; things never made to adorn, but to cover something that would be hid. It is with expression, and the clothing of a man’s conceptions, as with the clothing of a man’s body. All dress and ornament supposes imperfection, as designed only to supply the body with something from without, which it wanted, but had not of its own. Gaudery is a pitiful and a mean thing, not extending farther than the surface of the body ; nor is the highest gallantry considerable to any, but to those who would hardly be considered without it : for in that case indeed there may be great need of an outside, where there is little or nothing within.

“And thus also it is with the most necessary and important truths ; to adorn and clothe them is to cover them, and that to obscure them. The eternal salvation and damnation of souls are not things to be treated of with jests and witticisms. And he who thinks to furnish himself out of plays and romances with language for the pulpit, shews himself much fitter to act a part in the revels, than for a cure of souls.

“‘I speak the words of soberness,’ said St. Paul (Acts xxvi. 25) ; and I preach the gospel not with the ‘enticing words of man’s wisdom’ (1 Cor. ii. 4). This was the way of the apostle’s discoursing of things sacred. Nothing here of the ‘fringes of the north star’ ; nothing of ‘nature’s becoming unnatural’ ; nothing of the ‘down of angels’ wings,’ or ‘the beautiful locks of cherubims’ ; no starched similitudes introduced with a ‘Thus have I seen a cloud rolling in its airy mansion,’ and the like. No, these were sublimities above the rise of the apostolic spirit. For the apostles, poor mortals, were content to take lower steps, and to tell the world in plain terms, ‘that he who believed should be saved, and that he who believed not should be damned.’ And this was the dialect which pierced the conscience, and made the hearers cry out, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ It tickled not the ear, but sunk into the heart ; and when men came from such sermons, they never commended the preacher for his taking voice or gesture, for the fineness of such a simile or the quaintness of such a sentence ; but they spoke like men conquered with the overpowering force and evidence of the most concerning truths ; much in the words of the two disciples going to Emmaus : “Did not our hearts burn within us, while He opened to us the Scriptures?’”—*South*, 1633-1716.

[*Thursday Morning, 20th July, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that our prayers mingle with the prayers of the ages. What is life but one long cry to its Creator? Life is full of pain and misery, yet of joy and hope. Our life is not self-complete; it looks beyond, it yearns and wonders and cries in bewildered prayer. We thank Thee for religious aspiration, for holy desires that express themselves in holy words; for these words we bless Thee as for cleansing light and cleansing rain. Behold, we are the better for crying unto the heavens, for approaching the invisible throne, and, better still infinitely, when we approach the heavens and the throne through the Cross, the one Cross, the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift! We bless Thee that our prayers are added to the prayers of all history, and especially that our prayers are now taken up by the Advocate, the Intercessor, who ever liveth that He may plead our cause, and now He presents them at Thy throne, and because of His intercession we have Thy gracious replies in our wondering and grateful hearts. The Lord come to us amid all this noonday sunshine, and in the person of His Son show us the higher light, the light that shineth above the brightness of the noontide, a great smile that shall flood the soul with a new morning.

We say this in confidence, in faith, in hope; and we do not await the answer—it is already in our hearts. Amen.

SOLOMON'S PRAYER.

"An house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever."—
I KINGS viii. 13.



POOR notion; much praised where least understood, but singularly wanting in certain qualities. Yet from another point of view the grandest utterance that ever poured from human lips. The conception of the house is one thing; the prayer of dedication is another. Sometimes in the same brain there exist small ideas and great conceptions, so that the man is contradictory; we say, How great he can be, and then how small; how poor is one conception, and how almost infinite is another. Who can trace all the mysterious processes of the Holy Spirit? Who knows what rebukes our grandeur needs? who can tell what lofty thoughts are required sometimes to raise us out of the very dust and give us assurance that we belong to the citizenship of life?

Have you read the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple quietly, reverently, and from beginning to end without missing a single note? If so you will agree, I hope, with me that never was such prayer uttered before or since. It is the supreme prayer, it is all prayer; there is not one little petition or supplication anywhere that cannot nest in this grand adoration and entreaty. It is a Bible in itself, it is the total revelation of God; a man spake it—no man ever composed it. It is a recitation from the tablets of the heart; it is the wording and, so to say, the incarnation of a great movement of the Holy Ghost upon the whole nature of man; it stands alone; the stars pale before this diamond.

The prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple was—how can I say it? Shall I whisper it or thunder it? I must say it—the prayer at the dedica-

tion of the temple was offered by a layman! We finely distinguish persons and classes now; it suits man to draw up clever definitions and to establish pettifogging frontiers in the civilisation of thought and the distribution of terms. So now we have secular music and sacred. Where is your authority for that distinction? Observe, you are speaking of music, not of words. Where is the devil's gamut? where the flats and sharps, the quavers and breves of perdition? So also we have sacred history and profane. Who told you so? History is the other name of Providence; history is God in action; and I am not going to allow perverse man or tempting devil so to interfere with the action of the Divine providence as to establish a separate class of movement and dynasty. But perhaps the very queerest distinction ever touched by instrument of a mathematical sort is the distinction between priest and layman. Where is this unhappy layman? who gave thee this name? and when? and why? All the great prayers of the Bible came from lay lips. There were priests enough at the dedication of the temple; they were present, they were silent; it was the layman, the *man* that prayed: and it is only the *man* that can pray. We cannot have official prayers, mechanised and scheduled prayers. Men can only pray now and then in great heart-cries and in great heart-breaking misery. Who prayed for the city? who said, If I can find fifty men that obey Thy will, wilt Thou destroy the city? It was a layman, an eastern sheik, shepherd, king in his own way; and he prayed the Lord down to ten, and the Lord was detained by the laic lips and heard them speak their last words, and if they had gone further the Lord might have gone further too. Who was it that sanctified the wilderness by daily crying unto God to forgive the sin, to overlook it, to sheathe the sword, to keep back the blight? Aaron? Aaron was born dumb. It was Moses, the layman, the man, the great representative of human nature in its deepest need and sharpest pain. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended: was the son of Jesse an official priest? He was a man, a great man, a man with God in his heart. He offered the great poetic, ideal prayer; he struck the harp unto supplication and startled music into a new voice.

There is nothing in human nature or human need that is not to be found in Solomon's prayer when he dedicated the temple to the service of God. I find that prayer to be intensely evangelical. Is not evangelical quite a modern word? Possibly; I am not speaking of the word, I am speaking of the spirit. It is so often overlooked that there is an evangelical spirit as well as an evangelical creed, and it is often overlooked that the evangelical creed is not always recited in the evangelical spirit. The words of a sermon may all be evangelical, and yet there may be no Gospel in it. The Gospel is tears, pity, tenderness, redeeming condescension, offered blood, a great plea, a more than mother's entreaty. Have nothing to do with hard intellectual preaching, for there is nothing in it that is worth attending to; attend to the tremulous tone, to the gentle entreaty, to the plea formulated at the very foot of the Cross, and see in all the urgent rhetoric the staining of blood.

How can we show that the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple was intensely evangelical? By the frequent use of one of the greatest words in evangelical terminology. "When Thou hearest, Lord, forgive." That is the evangelical faith; that is the evangelical conception of the universe: that God can go back upon human history, and cleanse it; God can go into the human heart, and rid it of every stain and taint of guilt; God can take the redeeming blood into the human soul, and cleanse it, so that there shall be found no spot upon all the sacred beauty. Forgiveness has a family of words round about it; such words as sin, penitence, confession, deep conviction of sin, and a thorough assurance that only God can deal with sin. Forgive is not an isolated or detached word; it is a term pregnant with implications, it carries a grand theology in its very heart.

It was also a most experimental prayer:—"If they sin against Thee (for there is no man that sinneth not)." That is human history; that is the right conception of human nature. And "sinneth" is the right word to apply to the history of human life. This is not a question of dainty terms; we have

here no need of pedantic or academic definitions and limitations: as who should say, This was an error, or, That was a mistake, or, In the other instance we have an illustration of ethical want of colour or proportion. Away with such words! "If we confess our *sin*, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin." Let us have no model men behind whom to hide ourselves, for the word has gone forth on the high winds of heaven, There is *none* righteous, no, not one; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. So we cannot conceal ourselves within the shadow of some perfect respectability. It must come to penitence, to brokenheartedness, to making a clean breast of it in the sanctuary when we are alone with God. After that will come forgiveness, restoration, adoption, steps on the road to sanctification.

And what a pathetic prayer it is! At one point the great pleader says, Forgive the people, have pity upon them, save them, "For they be Thy people" (verse 51). That is the fundamental fact. They are bad. Yes, but they are still Thine. They have gone astray. Truly, but they still bear Thine image and likeness, in Thine image didst Thou create them; Thou wilt not forsake the work of Thine own hands. But they are perverse, disobedient rebellious, self-regarding. No doubt, but "they be Thy people." The tigers cannot sin against Thee, they were not moulded in Thy bosom; the beasts of the earth have no decalogue which Thou hast set up for their obedience, because they did not come out of Thine heart, Thou great Maker and Father: but these people be Thy people, Thy sons and daughters; at the worst, still Thine. Forgive them; pity Thine own; remember whose they are, and out of what difficulties they have struggled their way. I do not excuse them, I do not palliate them, I do not say they have merely misbehaved: O Lord God of Israel, they have sinned; but they be Thine still; do not cast them off. So said Peter once: Lord, Thou knowest all things, all the blasphemy and cowardice and perfidy, and yet Thou knowest that I love Thee. Thus human nature is read in its deepest mystery, and thus the Divine clemency is interpreted in its most essential pathos.

You like a practical prayer? You will find the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple one of the most practical prayers in all history. For he says, "When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain"—he is going now to pray for the fields, the crops; he is now going to anticipate hunger, and anticipate God in its prevention—"If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar, plague, and sickness." If you wanted a practical prayer it is here; your story is told by this man in words that are tears; he knows and interprets you to God. Then said he, under these circumstances, "What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place"—where there is no rain, hear Thou; where there is gaunt famine, hear Thou; when sickness is coming on apace and the plague has already sent some forebreathings of its pestilence—"then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and when Thou hearest, Lord, forgive," and testify to Thy forgiveness by rain, plentifulness, health, and the liberty of hope. There is a theology of providence; there is a theology of domestic life; there is a theology of national circumstances.

Ah! but it was all Israel, Israel, Israel; it was a Jew's prayer; it was patriotic, but not philanthropic. You have not read the prayer. We began by assuming that we had all read this prayer quietly, reverently, and literally; you made no objection to that assumption, and now you are contravening it in the most reckless and discreditable manner. You say it was a Jew's prayer. It was not. It was all about Israel. It was not. Hear verse 41—"Moreover concerning the stranger, that is not of Thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for Thy name's sake; (for they shall hear of Thy great name, and of Thy strong hand, and of Thy stretched out arm;) when the stranger shall come and pray toward this house; hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to Thee for." How the Bible widens; how it takes in nation after

nation; how sometimes quite suddenly it claims the whole earth, and promises to One fairer than the fairest of men the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost part of the earth for His possession. It was, therefore, not a patriotic prayer only, but a philanthropic prayer. The Bible is not a patriotic book; the Bible does not care for our little globes and all their marks of latitude and longitude, and green for one country, and red for another, and frontiers of man invention, representing man's rapacity or man's selfishness or man's ambition. The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, and not a wavelet beats on the seashore that is not in the thought of God. We must rise to this conception of things before we can truly pray. It is right to pray for our own family if we make that a starting-point of a still larger prayer; it is right to pray for our own monarch or our own republican president if we make that the starting-point of a grand cosmopolitan prayer, in which we bathe the whole earth, asking for the total globe the forgiveness and the pity and the sovereignty of God.

The same prayer is needed to-day. It is difficult to get any nominally Christian man to sit through the reading of Solomon's prayer when it is read at the dedication of a modern temple or house of devotion. It is most pitiable; such conduct sickens the truly devotional heart. The merely nominal Christian, who ought to have been a leading atheist, says, "They read that long prayer in the Chronicles." It is distressing, it takes the soul out of one's enthusiasm. If these people would only believe that they really are unbelievers, non-believers, and would go with their own gang, we should be richer without them and stronger; they do not belong to the Son of God. When you go out to convert the atheists take with you all the rubbish I refer to, and burn it, or convert it.

The world will always need a house of prayer if we understand the word house of prayer in its fullest interpretation. Hear this most penetrating critic:—"David cannot have written some of the psalms because he speaks about dwelling in the house of the Lord when there was no house of the Lord to dwell

in." Ah me! there is a vacant chair for that man in the house of atheism; let him go and occupy it, he will at least be a death's-head at the feast. No house of God before the temple? When was there anything but a house of God? Long before the stones of the temple were quarried or the cedars cut down from the hillside a man said in rocky places one grey morning, the sun hardly risen, This is none other than the house of God. That is the right interpretation of nature. "House" does not mean merely four walls and a roof; it means hospitality, security, fellowship, closeting with the invisible and the eternal; then though there be no house of man's building there is still God's house—a cave, a rock, a bleak mountain, a sea all tumult. Where God is the house is in the true deep sense of that term. You can find the house of God in the most thronged thoroughfare of the metropolis; you can be in the midst of a crowd, and yet uncounted millions of miles away from all the uproar. Give a right interpretation of all this, and you will have no difficulty about any practical question concerning the inspiration and completeness and the final authority of what we still venture to claim as the Word of God.

Jesus Christ was a Priest. Yes, He is *the* Priest, the High Priest. "We have an advocate with the Father, the man"—I had omitted that word; that is the keyword. We have an Advocate, a Paraclete, a Goel; a man who has espoused our cause and undertaken to plead it in the innermost temple of God; an Advocate, a Man. The Advocate is a temporary term, Mediator is a transient office; for the time shall come when Jesus shall rise from His mediatorial throne, and God shall be all in all.

If a man has not been answered you may be perfectly sure that he has never prayed. Men so frequently begin the argument at the wrong point. A man says, "I have prayed, and got no answer." I say you have not; the very fact that you have not got an answer proves that you have not prayed. You have gabbled, you have used religious phrases, you have assumed pious attitudes, but you have not prayed. You have not—why?—because you ask not. O back-

boneless, nominal Christians, who are frightened by some man's impious inquiry as to the efficacy of prayer! whereas all such inquiries were anticipated and answered long ago. If we have not it is because we ask not. If prayer is unanswered it is because prayer has not been offered, or if it has been offered in a certain kind of way it has been prayer amiss; we have asked in the wrong way or in the wrong spirit or under the wrong circumstances. The question, therefore, should now be, not, Do you believe in the efficacy of prayer? or, Do you believe that prayer is ever answered? the question should now be, Have you ever PRAYED?

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

“At Hampton Court Palace, everyone regards with wonder the enormous vine loaded with so vast a multitude of huge clusters. Just outside the vine-house is as fine a specimen of wistaria, and when it is in full bloom the cluster-like masses of bloom cause you to think it a flower-bearing vine, as the other is a fruit-bearing vine. Fit emblems these two famous trees of two ministries, both admired, but not equally to be prized; the ministry of oratory, luxuriant in metaphor and poetry, and the ministry of grace, abounding in sound teaching and soul-saving energy. Gay as are the flower-clusters of the wistaria, no one mistakes them for the luscious bunches of the grape; yet there are many simpletons in spiritual things who mistake sound sense, and seem to satisfy their hunger not on solid meat, but on the jingle of a musical dinner-bell.”—*Spurgeon*.

“Sir Astley Cooper, on visiting Paris, was asked by the surgeon *en chef* of the Empire how many times he had performed a certain wonderful feat of surgery. He replied that he had performed the operation thirteen times. ‘Ah, but, monsieur! I have done him one hundred and sixty times. How many times did you save his life?’ continued the curious Frenchman, after he had looked into the blank amazement of Sir Astley’s face. ‘I,’ said the Englishman, ‘saved eleven out of the thirteen. How many did you save out of one hundred and sixty?’ ‘Ah, monsieur! I lose them all; but de operation was very *brilliant*.’

“Of how many popular ministries might the same verdict be given! Souls are not saved, but the preaching is very brilliant. Thousands are attracted and operated on by the rhetorician’s art, but what if he should have to say of his admirers, ‘I lose them all, but the sermons were very brilliant!’”—*Spurgeon*.

“The faithful minister endeavours to get the general love and good-will of his parish. This he does, not so much to make a benefit of them, as a benefit for them, that his ministry may be more effectual; otherwise he may preach his own heart out, before he preaches anything into theirs. The good conceit of the physician is half a cure; and his practice will scarce be happy where his person is hated. Yet he humours them not in his doctrine, to get their love; for such a spaniel is worse than a dumb dog. He should sooner get their good-will by walking uprightly than by crouching and creeping. If pious living and painful labouring in his calling will not win their affections, he counts it gain to lose them. And for those who causelessly hate him, he pities and prays for them; and such there will be. I should suspect his preaching had no salt in it, if no galled horse did wince.”—*Fuller*, 1608-1661.

[*Thursday Morning, 27th July, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou knowest our life, its every joy and its every pain. Thou knowest the wondrous way through which we pass into the heavenly kingdom ; Thine eye is upon all our paths ; the steps of Thy people are ordered by the Lord, their feet shall not slide. We are not in our own keeping, we are in the hands of God. It is well, it is best, it is our heaven. We know Thee by many names, names of majesty and names of tenderness ; we will think of the names that touch our heart :— The God of all comfort, The Father of mercies, The God of all grace, The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we cling to those names ; they are full of tenderness and pity and love. We bless Thee for all Thy names, but especially for those that touch our heart-ache and our tears and our sorrow for which there are no words. We bless Thee for the great sky, but we thank Thee also for the little flowers that grow in our own little garden. Thou art everywhere ; come near us in that which is little and gentle, and pity us. For these altars we bless Thee, for they are always accessible, and always needed by our pierced and wounded hearts. Let the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ come to us in all the condescension of the Cross, in all the pity of His ineffable love ; then shall our hearts be glad as if it were already the morning of the resurrection. Amen.

CXCVI.

OUR LORD JESUS.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ."—I COR. xvi. 23.



HE text is in the Epistle to the Romans; the text is in both the Epistles to the Corinthians; the text is in the Epistle to the Galatians, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, in the Epistle to the Philippians, in the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians. It is in the brief note to Philemon; it is in the Epistles of Peter, and Jude could not write his little burning note without using it three times. The text is everywhere, in the heavens above and on the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth. What is it? It is short, but it is full as an acorn that holds all the oaks of Bashan in possibility.

The text is "Our Lord Jesus Christ." He was before all things; He is above all things; by Him all things consist, to Him they owe their cohesion and unity, their poetry and their purpose. It is the theme of every true ministry. He who has alighted upon this text need not turn a page, though he minister from jubilee to jubilee, and through all the coming, rising, falling, millenniums of time. He cannot be short of a subject; the preacher's subject is fixed; he is not dependent upon the journals of the day or upon the accident of the morning. His theme never changes; it is the all-comprehensive theme; there is nothing of monotony or sameness about it; these seven notes have in them the greatest oratorios yet to be written.

It will be profitable to fix upon the keyword, so far as our special appropriation of the name is concerned. That personal, domestic, love-word is "our" Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the word "our" that the pathos palpitates and cries; not Lord Jesus, not Lord Jesus.

with a grammatical article before it, but Lord Jesus with *our* in front of it,—our Saviour; though the world despise Him, He is ours. We are pledged men; we are not walking up and down amid a dozen Christs asking which we shall have, or shall we have any or none; we represent a vow, an oath; we carry about with us the brand, the stigma of the Lord Jesus. A wondrous little word is *our*. *Our* child; he is not beautiful according to formal notions of beauty, he is not so precocious as other children are, he is not brilliant, he is by no means so shapely as if he were a trained athlete: but he is our child. Our eyes are blind to any possible deficiency; our eyes cannot see what the eyes of cold criticism can perceive. The reason is that the child lives in the heart; he is our child, and the house would be no house without him. If that little child were not to come home to-night nobody under our roof could go to bed. Why, he is only one. True, but he is ours. He is only little, fragile, puny. Quite true, but he is ours. They could go to bed next door if the child never came home, because he does not belong to next door; he belongs to our house, and he is our child, and our comfort, and our song, and our hope, and we said when he first came, This same shall comfort us: and old age was put back because of this great promise and this most heavenly joy.

So we speak of *our* country. That is a favourite word with you Americans, and I rejoice to welcome a shipload of you here this morning. I had no sooner got in sight of Staten Island than a friend on board came to me and said, "What do you think of our country?" I liked it; there was a sense of appropriation and personal interest and responsible patriotism; and if a man shall treat his country as if it were the country of another man, a stranger's land, I should not put much trust in that man. I do not believe in a narrow patriotism. I could not accept any patriotism that was inconsistent with philanthropy; and yet there is a sense in which the stones of our country, whatever it be, are more precious than the stones of any other country, though the stones of the other country be diamonds, and precious to the lapidary. It is an instinct, it is

an inborn something, it is a mystery, but a mystery that is poetic, inspiring, comforting, ennobling. It is by the culture of such instincts that we become intellectually and morally rich and free.

Where is there a man who does not say with natural pride "our house"? It is not a big one; the garden, front and back, can hardly be called a garden; the rooms are not large, there are few pictures on the walls, but we keep the window open, and he who keeps his window open may some day pray, for it is a long distance that man can see through his open window, and he may see in the clouds, where the first tabernacle was built, Jerusalem, the city of the great King; it may come into his heart whilst he looks through the open window, to fall upon his knees and cry to the Invisible and the Almighty. No other house is so dear to him as *our* house; the wife is there, and all the children, and the few books in the corner shelved upon the bookcase which his own hands have made. He does not feel at home in any other house; in *our* house he has rest and sense of security. Never obliterate or modify that word *our*, it is a personal pronoun that holds an entire grammar in itself.

And so, carrying the idea to its highest, widest application, we come upon "our Lord Jesus Christ." He may not be the Lord of some other man, but He is our Lord, we cannot dispute about Him. Who would bring his own wife into the market for a public opinion? he wants no public criticism upon his larger life, his true grand heart; he silences criticism. Alas! we sometimes invite it upon the Man of God. Where we should knock a man down if he said words like that about our wife, we permit the fool to expectorate his contempt upon the name that we hold dearest of all. Remember, whatever He may be to other people, He is our Lord Jesus, our Saviour, our hope, and to stand by whilst He is being traduced is treachery; in such a case silence is blasphemy. He becomes our Lord Jesus Christ by a double process. First of all, it is an intelligent acceptance of a sovereignty. We know what we are doing; we have read the documents, we have com-

panied with Christ along the whole line of His recorded word, we have spoken much with Him as soul may speak to soul ; we know Him in the darkness, He could not stand upon any seashore without our instantly recognising Him and saying, It is the Lord ! That Figure cannot be conjured by any process, metamorphosis ; we know the Lord by signs masonic, indisputable.

Our election of this sovereignty is not only intelligent, it is voluntary. We had the option, we knew the terms, they were declared very definitely and pathetically :—If any man will be My disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me ; the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. Wilt thou come ? How few have come ! but their strength is in their quality. Faith will outlast fear, speculation, and vacillation of mind. Strange as it may appear, we could have been atheists, we had the choice, we had the chance ; we could have taken up God's Book, as it is called by Christian believers, and lectured on the mistakes of Moses and the confusion of Biblical authorships and chronologies ; we could have shut the Book, and laid it down in contempt ; we could, we did not. We claim to be at least in an average sense intelligent men, we claim to be responsible creatures ; we might to-day have been going with a multitude to do evil, but by the grace of God we were enabled to say, No ; henceforth we walk with our Lord Jesus. It would seem from the representations of some persons, who neither measure their words nor remember them, that we are Christians by a kind of external compulsive force,—as if the magistrate had made us Christians ; as if we had been arrested by a number of special constables and forced into the Church. We have not ; we are consenting slaves, we bow in intelligent and voluntary homage at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have this advantage over the infidel and over the bad man, that we know all that can be known on that side of the wall. The infidel knows nothing about the power of faith ; the bad man has never been within telescope distance of the altar ; not only has he not prayed, he

cannot pray; the moment he begins to think about praying he ceases to be bad. He who is corrupt of heart and determined to do evil cannot pray, and his opinion upon prayer ought never to be requested. When the blind man gives an opinion upon colour the bad man may give an opinion about goodness. He is disqualified from the beginning, he has perverted the very purpose of his life. We have been on that side of things. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; we have forsaken the fountain of living waters, we have hewn out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. We know all that the devil knows, and we scout him, and spit upon him, and scorn him back to his proper perdition. It is of course a mischievous thing and exerts temporarily a mischievous influence, that persons should suppose that we know nothing about the world, the flesh, or the devil, that they only know about the so-called freedom or licentiousness of a wicked life. We know it all; we have murdered the holy Ten, all the Decalogue we have butchered; we know, therefore, what sin is and what sin can do, and how hot the liquor of the pit is, and in the strength of God we deliberately set it down and say, No more! we touch not, taste not, handle not the unclean thing: begone! Christianity is not a fancy holiday occupation; we come into the realisation of its spirit and its discipline by the dolorous way, by the way of the Cross.

I repeat, therefore, that we are pledged men, we are wedded men. We are not going up and down the bazaar and mart looking over all the unholy advertisements to see what religions are to be had at a cheap rate, and whether we can exchange our rag of religion for some mantle of piety that looks genteel and yet costs little, and does not ask us to be too religious; we never read the advertisements, we are not open to a gift. Married man, go thou and advertise for another wife whilst thy wife is living! That would be decency compared to the Christian man so-called who is going up and down asking the newest speculation and for what price he can buy several convenient religions as a job lot. That is not our position; we are married; an oath protects the sanctity of our devotion.

This is what I want to say more and more of in the Church. We are dealing so often with numbers of persons who profess to be religious, and yet have no Christ. There are even young men who go to the hall or lecture-room in which they can hear another man discourse against the very Christ whose name they outwardly bear. Oh, 'tis horrible, most horrible! no murder so horrible!—that a man should drink the red blood of Sacrament, and then slink away in the evening to hear what some man has got to say against his Lord. We want constancy, fealty, downright unequivocal consecration; then the world will know that the Christ-manhood still leads.

He is our Lord Jesus in example, in doctrine, in sorrow, in joy. How did He bear His sorrow?—even so must I bear mine, saith the Christian in every night-shadowed Gethsemane; I will listen to my Lord that I may know how to bear my sorrow; He delivered several sweet discourses upon grief and pain of heart, I will listen to Him, His voice is music; if I do not understand His words, I can kiss the lips that speak them:—Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me: Fear not, little flock; peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. God help me, then! I will try to be a man. If the Lord Jesus spake such words, He did not speak them wastefully or idly, He spake them to a heart broken, helpless, hopeless; I do my Lord dishonour by letting His words lie outside the sanctuary of my heart; I will take them all in, and if I cannot sing my prayer, I will moan it. What did my Lord say? “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Sh!—He comes! an angel has touched Him, He has been reeling, but now He is steady again; He says, Arise, awake, come with Me! My Lord expects me to follow His example, and by His name and in His grace and strength I will. That is piety of the Christian sort. My Lord will not have mere admiration, He does not live in the external, He does not respond to mere admiration or formal beauty or moral excellence or charming personality. He says, No: if any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross. Then how many Christians

are there? God knows. Their number may be few. The first may be last, and the last may be first. It is not for us to judge. It is that cruel, ghostly Cross that makes it so hard to be a Christian. If it were only to admire the Beatitudes or even to repeat the Commandments, all would be well, but it is the Cross, the Calvary, the Gethsemane, the Blood. I have kept back myself, and thrown a guinea to my Lord. Ah me! thou worse than Iscariot; some hotter hell must be prepared for thee; for thou knowest thy Lord's will, and thou didst it not. Thou didst kiss the hem of His mantle, but thou didst not kiss the wound of His heart. So hard is it to be a Christian! The Cross is the tear of the universe—the great hot tear on the cheek of God.

[*Thursday Morning, 12th October, 1899.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know that we have every one turned to his own way ; we know that there is none righteous, no, not one ; we are sure that we are all in the bond of iniquity as well as in the gall of bitterness. We plead guilty to all these charges ; we have done the things that we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done ; we are witnesses against ourselves ; our soul cries out in its own name, God be merciful unto me, a sinner ! All self-boasting is destroyed, our self-confidence is ended ; we see Jesus, and in Him we see our sufficiency ; He answers Thy righteousness, He makes honourable Thy law, He represents Thy love, He offers us the great redemption : may we as wise men listen, and as obedient men respond with the service of a lifetime. If any soul be overborne, if the darkness be too dense and the road too crooked, let the Lord, in His condescending and tender providence, come to such and show him the right way ; and if any man is waiting in hope that almost immediately the door may open and the great heaven may welcome him into its rest, the Lord be gracious for all such hope and joyful confidence. Shed abroad Thy love in our hearts ; then our lives shall be sanctified, and we shall go forth in Thy strength to do Thy work without fear, ever abounding in the triumph of hope. Amen.

CXCVII.

THE ANXIOUS QUESTION.

"What shall I do with Jesus?"—MATT. xxvii. 22.



THE eternal question ; the question which every man must consider and perhaps settle in some way or other, certainly either negatively or positively. This is not yesterday's question only, or the question of last century ; it is the question of every morning, of every crisis ; it is our question, and we cannot honestly and with edification put it away from us.

In the first instance it was Pilate's question ; let us see how it came to be the question of the perplexed judge. When Pilate was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just Man : for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him. That added greatly to the ruler's perplexity. Meanwhile, the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you ? And they said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ ? They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified. There was a definite response. The governor said, Why, what evil hath He done ? But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified.

We accommodate the question without for one moment altering its substance or its meaning, and put it in this form, What shall I do with Jesus ? We take it out of its local setting and give it a universal and historical environment. It is the question, or ought to be the question, and will one day

certainly be the question, of every soul. Let us discourse upon the matter in tranquillity; this is the time to make our decision; death is not immediately at the door; the great white face of judgment is not brightening the heavens with ghastly lustre. We seem to have a time of leisure; we are prepared to discuss a great question and to solve a great problem. That question or problem is, What shall I do with Jesus? Shall I ignore Him? You cannot; He is in so many places, He operates along so many lines, impalpable but sensitive; He seems to be the nerve of creation. If I could play the fool and drink or drown my senses away, I might for one little moment ignore the Christ and allow the people to do with Him what they pleased. But sobriety returns, great crises shape themselves and look at me, perilous places occur in life, great seas arise around me, and I cry out for help, and the word that naturally comes to my lips is, Lord, help me, or I perish. The atheist cannot ignore God; he swears by the very God he denies. There is a great effort to ignore the Christ, but when you endeavour to ignore the Son of God you ignore all the great questions which belong to His personality and all the great issues which are represented in His holy faith. You cannot cut off the Son of God, and be done with the matter; it recurs, it meets you at the corner, it taps on your door at midnight, it is a ghost, a shadow, less a substance than a film. If it could be dismissed—I mean that the whole Christ idea—once for all, then we could wallow in impiety, and hold a nightly revel in the intoxication of delirium tremens of a moral kind. But when we ignore Jesus we ignore the blue heavens; when we ignore the Christ we ignore every blade of grass, every bird that sings in the spring, every blossom that paints the woods in heavenly colours. The greatest of Englishmen, in the matter of observation and expertness and skilfulness in scientific investigation, says—and we may read the words as if in his own handwriting, for they have been printed from his own manuscript—When I gave up the idea of God, music ceased to charm me, art ceased to interest me. You cannot give up the Creator without giving up at the same time the creation. It would be a pitiful way, therefore, to answer the question, What shall I do

with Jesus? to say, Ignore Him, take no heed of Him, sweep the brain-chamber clear of such thready cobwebs; it would be intellectually mean, as well as morally impossible.

What, then, shall I do with Jesus, which is called the Christ? Shall I admire Him? That is impossible. Admire a bust, admire some triumph in painting, admire yourself, but do not insult the Eternal by admiring Him. God does not come within the sphere of admiration; God is not to be received as a great surprise in the evolution of human life and thought. I would rather you denied Christ than that you merely admired Him. Jesus Christ was too much or too little to be admired. Admire an equal, pay the tribute of your imagination to some superior on the same level as your own; but do not admire Christ, treat Him as a work of art, regard Him as a great mass in church music; do not make a living out of Him by making oratorios regarding Him and singing them. You must do more, or you must do less. Jesus Christ was more than a man, or less and worse than a man. I have no difficulty as to the place in which to put Jesus Christ. I cannot reconcile His doctrines with His mere humanity, and I could not reconcile His humanity with His claims to deity. He never asks me to admire Him. He says, Come to Me if you are in distress; if any man thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink; I have come to seek and to save the lost. We may believe in Him, but not admire Him. Admiration is not Christianity; admiration is not Christianity because admiration is not sacrifice. We must know the power of the shed blood and shed our own blood because we believe in the redeeming stream, before we can enter into the mystery of this question, What shall I do with Jesus, which is called Christ? Shall I set up in dreams a universe that can do without Him? Do not degrade fancy into blasphemy. We have no business to set up a universe of any kind, nor have we the power to do so, not even the power in dreams to create suns and constellations and brotherhoods of worlds in which there shall be no God. Some things are *à priori* impossible, transcendently and in their own nature impossible; not impossible

in the sense of a great difficulty, but impossible in the sense of impossibility in its transcendental and metaphysical meaning. Do not substitute a nightmare for a revelation. And who are we that we should dream universes—we that were never out of our own world, we that make gaslights in order that we may light papers at them? We—forsooth!—dream a universe that can do without a Saviour! Moreover, we are in a frivolous intellectual mood when we make any such proposition; that is not the intellectual mood in which to consider the question at all: we can only consider the Christ in the relation in which we stand to our own sin; a man who is unconscious of sin, personal and from a human point of view unpardonable, cannot hear the Gospel. No sinner who is not conscious of his own guilt can listen to a sermon; he can listen to the words, he can criticise the grammar and the philosophy, but the ear of his pain is not open, and it is only into that ear that God can pour the music of His Gospel.

What, then, shall I do with Jesus? The people whom Pilate addressed had a ready answer. "Destroy Him." You cannot. "Crucify Him." You may, but not destroy. I would rather you denied Christ, and crucified Him every day in the week, than that you ignored Him, admired Him, or tried to fancy a universe that had no need of Him. I have hope of blatant unbelief; I have something to work upon when a man comes to me and denies the Christ and breaks His bone; but what is there to get hold of in a nature that smatteringly admires, that treats the Son of God as if He were an item in an art catalogue? And what is to be done with a man who can put his little cross or tick against that item in the art catalogue that he may talk to his friends about it afterwards and admire it as a miracle in art? The soul is out of the question; that mood cannot be religious; no plough has ripped up the soil of that nature and made furrows for the reception of spiritual seed. I would rather preach to a gang of unbelievers than to an indifferent hymn-singing assembly. I have hope of the murderer, I have none of the indifferent, self-satisfied, sleepy soul; therefore I would

that he might go out into the dark places and the wilderness and the out-of-the-way localities where the word of Christ is utterly unknown. I would that we could find a heathenism in our own city and preach there the glorious Gospel of redemption by grace. I have indeed sometimes wished, I have perhaps occasionally expressed the wish, that all merely indifferent admirers of Christ would go away from the church. Their presence is a burden, their smile is a hindrance; when they grasp your hand, which they never do, or it is a poor nerveless touch, they send a shudder to your heart. We want enthusiasm, passion, sacrifice, heroic love, that we may stun the world, and stop it in its revel and choke it in its banquet.

We cannot get rid of Christ. There are many things in life which we cannot get rid of. You know it, we all know it. We bury them for a time, but there is an upheaval of the green grass under which we have interred them. Did you see it? I think I saw something. That was it. Did you see it? What? An upheaval and throbbing as if something were alive even under the daisied sod. I think I saw something like that. That is it. What? A sin you thought to get rid of, the night you wanted to bury, the blasphemy which you dare not now put into words. There are many things you cannot get rid of. You cannot get rid of the man you murdered. But you plunged him into a stream a hundred feet deep. Yes, and that stream will be red for ever; they will not see the crimson who walk with you, but you will see it, and you will say, Let us change our course. But at a bend of the stream it will roll by your feet, and you will see it, though your companions be swallowed up with laughter and unholy glee. But I thought that nobody knew that I had murdered that man. Perhaps nobody does know, but you know and you dare not look at your own face in your own looking glass, and you dare not stir out of the house after daylight, and you dare hardly be seen alone, and you want to have at least some child's hand to grip to make you wish that you were not in hell. Dear sirs, there are some things you cannot get rid of. You cannot get rid of the heart you have broken. You broke her heart, and she will torment you for

ever. You vowed to her, plighted troth to her, you prayed together, the devil got hold of you and wrought his miracle of seduction in a heart that was thought to be stronger than bastions of solid rock, and without shedding blood you killed a heart. You cannot get rid of it; drink cannot drown it. Ay, if the ocean were drink, and you could drown it all, you would find a broken heart lying amid the upbraiding rocks. Do not suppose that life is frivolous if you make it so: life is what it is in the purpose of God, and in the purpose of God it was made responsible, and must answer before the throne of God, and according to the law of God: and if you, with white-livered lips, try to make out a case for yourself, the broken heart is there, and you dare not look at the accusing ghost. Get rid of it, destroy it, crucify it? There are some things, I repeat, which cannot be done, not because they are difficult, but because they are in a sevenfold sense transcendently and eternally impossible.

You cannot get rid of a trust you have betrayed. And these dead trusts live, they haunt you. Why are you so pale? Are you not well? Oh, yes, I am well. What makes you become fatigued and overborne so soon? You used to be strong and valiant, and we gave you a permanent birthday, not a fickle festival of the calendar: what is it that is troubling you? Oh, nothing, nothing! You say it as if you did not believe it, and other people hear it as if they did not believe it, and the whole angry heaven is reddening over you, and the earth is becoming a poor security on which to rest your feet. What a changeling you have become, I would say to the man whom I am addressing in imagination and whom I know but too well; you have made a thousand vows, and forgotten them; once on a sick bed, which was very nearly being a death-bed, you said, If I get better I will be a very different man. You got better, and went back to your old manhood, so-called. We cannot get rid of that fact. You said, If God will prosper me in this business, I will give Him a tenth part of my income. He prospered you, and you gave your ten pounds in the hundred, and were quite cordial. Your income doubled, and quadrupled, and became

tenfold, and you said, This is getting rather costly; the devil, sitting on your shoulder and whispering into your ear, said, It is too much! and you listened to him, and ever since then your face has become weazened, your eyes have lost their godly fire, your enthusiasm has become evaporated. You say, If I could be delivered out of this perplexity, I will attend the ordinances of divine worship, I will associate myself with many divine instrumentalities, I will never consider myself again. And you were delivered out of your perplexities—and I dare not ask you for one golden piece.

You cannot get rid of broken trusts; they come in to claim restitution. I know your Stock Exchange habit, for I read of it but this morning, in which a man hammers, and the noisiest Exchange becomes silent as a sanctuary, whilst the hammerer announces A or B has failed to answer his liabilities. How many trusts will come up and how many divine hammerers there will be who will call attention by some stroke on the anvil of the universe, and it shall be said of this man and of that, He broke his trust, he failed to keep his word. If you can do these things in your Stock Exchange, why not do them in the sanctuary of your own heart? I drive home that question to myself, a convicted sinner awaiting the final drop.

But if some good, loving heart should say, I am in earnest about this matter, what shall I do with Jesus? then I should start the discourse from the opposite point, and say, Love Him, trust Him, serve Him. That would be my answer in music to your question of melody. Would God that many here would ask this penetrating question to-day! When it is asked in a sober, tender, anxious manner, it is the whole heaven that replies to the sublime inquiry. Do not keep Jesus in your house as a statue; do not set Him upon some hollow pedestal, as a marble bust, treated with skilled and expert hands; do not give another thousand pounds for a painted face of Christ, and ask your friend to admire it after dinner. But, O my soul, be thou thyself the Christ in thy poor degree, let thy life so shine before men that they, seeing thy good works, may glorify thy Father which is in heaven.

What shall I do with Jesus? Follow Him. How shall I know the road? By the marks of His feet. What are the marks upon His feet? Nail wounds. "Hath He marks to lead me to Him, if He be my guide?" Behold the pierced hands and the pierced side and the stigma of the Cross. How shall I know that I am following Him? By the weight of the cross, the heaviest cross but one in the world; Christ's the heaviest, then mine the next in weight. Let this be our daily question, What shall I do with Jesus? And ask the question not indifferently or even intellectually or even artistically and æsthetically, but ask it penitentially and hopefully, and you will know what to do with Christ, for Christ will come into your heart, and be your guest for ever. The feast that He adorns never ends.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

“A monstrous vat, certainly, is the great tun of Heidelberg. It might hold eight hundred hogsheads of wine at the least; but what is the use of such wasted capacity, since, for nearly a hundred years, there has not been a drop of liquor in it! Hollow and sounding, empty and void and waste; vintages come and go, and find it perishing of dry rot. An empty cask is not so great a spectacle after all, let its size be what it may, though old travellers called this monster one of the wonders of the world. What a thousand pities it is that many men of genius and of learning are, in respect of usefulness, no better than this huge but empty tun of Heidelberg! Very capacious are their minds, but very unpractical. Better be a poor household kilderkin, and give forth one’s little freely, than exist as a useless prodigy, capable of much and available for nothing.”—*Spurgeon*.

“Truths of daily use are like bread and salt—whatever else is on, these must be on the board every meal. ‘I will not be negligent,’ says Peter, ‘to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them.’”—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

“I know it is a beaten path I am now walking in, and I shall rather speak ἀλλῶς than ἄλλᾶ, the same things for substance which you may meet in many others, only a little otherwise shaped on my private forge. For my own part, I think it more wisdom to borrow a sword of proved metal at another’s hands, than to go with a weak leaden one of my own in the field, and so come home well beaten for my folly and pride.”—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

“God has His people whom He created, and Jesus Christ redeemed, even in little places as well as in great parishes: in small villages, as well as in great cities. These have souls to save as well as others. Little flocks should have shepherds, as well as great herds: such as are poor servants of the family would be glad to have food to eat, as well as the chiefest persons. To instruct a country village is a work of mercy, as well as to teach the mother cities of a kingdom; and to be careful of the high or head places, but careless of little hamlets, is as unmerciful a part as to pamper up a great family and to let a little one starve for hunger; or as if a prince should provide for the safety of great multitudes of his subjects, and neglect the lesser companies that abide in poorer villages; or as if a man should tender the welfare of his head, and never regard his foot or his finger.”—*Attersol*, 1618.

Thursday Morning, 4th January, 1900.]

Prayer.

ALmighty GOD, Thou hast brought us, in Thy great mercy, and by Thy tender care, to the first service of another year. We have been more than thirty years together, and still we gather ourselves around the altar of the Cross, and thank God for the incarnation and for the redemption of Jesus Christ our Lord. He became man—an explanation that deepens the mystery which it can never solve. He redeemed man—love beyond all words, all thoughts and dreams. Yet we enter into it as we enter into the mystery of the sky, with its light and warmth and spring and summers unborn. We have grieved Thee during the year that is gone ; we repent of our sins, we smite our breasts with swift blows ; we have done that which we ought not to have done : God be merciful unto us whilst we linger at the sacred Cross ! Thou hast bereaved some, and made them poor indeed ; Thou hast enriched others with new wealth : many Thou hast tried by severe affliction, by tormenting poverty, by vexation and perplexity, and by quickly kindled and burning fire. Yet in some way, in ever-varying degrees of ardour, of love and faith, we desire to praise Thee and to kiss the hand, but not the rod. The Lord help us in another year to be men indeed, such men as the world has never seen since Bethlehem ; great in thought, tender in heart, indomitable in will, resting ourselves upon the breast of God, and finding in it an infinite sufficiency of rest. The Lord pity us when we are at our best, for our best is poor. Amen.

THE APPARENTLY RIDICULOUS.

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"—JOB xiv. 4.



Is it not ridiculous? Is it not opposed to every known law of sequence? Does it not upset all our conceptions of the fitness of things? Is not absurdity marked upon the very face of the suggestion? If this apparent ridiculousness were to be found in this text alone we might have to seek some petty excuse for its intrusion. This, however, is not an exceptional instance. The whole Bible in many of its most vital points excites a sense of the ridiculous. There must be some method in this; this cannot be casual or accidental; there must be a method in this madness. The Bible is full of challenges to all the faculties of man and to all the phases and expressions of his multifold imagination. It would seem as if God delighted in defiances. He defies the gods of the nations; He takes them by their heads and shakes them; He lays hold of them and nails them to the wall and laughs at them. He will have nothing to do with your favourite science, you blundering misinterpreters of comparative religions—the nonsense which man loves when he is out on some frivolous holiday-making. This study has, when ill-conducted, been most mischievous to the cause of Christianity: when it has been intelligently and ably conducted it has resulted in a great argument in favour of the Christian religion. God would institute some inquiry of comparative religions by dashing the idols to pieces, and then asking them to rise up again; that is His way of treating these comparative deifications of stupid or inanimate matter.

Another defiance or challenge which God addresses to the human mind is tending to excite its sense of ridiculousness; its wonder more curious than

reverent, its feeling that surely such propositions and statements are evidently opposed to reason. Again and again this is done. God will not have any of your comparative reasons; He will not allow the little statement that authority is opposed to reason to have any place in His sanctuary. He dashes down reason, that He may keep it in its proper place; He reconstructs it with new energy and fills it with new inspiration, that it may know itself and its function, its destiny, and its responsibility. He will not, however, have such foolish statements that are quite intellectual puzzles to some inferior minds, as, Does it stand to reason? is it not opposed to reason? is it not opposed to everything that we have hitherto been accustomed to suppose to be right? Yes, it is! Why do you hesitate to give your answer? why do you mumble it and apologise for it? The Christianity of the Cross is not a little thing that stands beside your little perpendicular of right and reason, and says, Pray measure me, and if I am other than you suppose I ought to be, take pity upon my deficiency or cut off my excrescences, and reduce me to the proprieties. God builds no brick walls: God builds trees, whose shapelessness is shape, whose wantonness and licence are steps of liberty. Throughout the Bible we shall find that we are always startled by the apparently ridiculous. That is the fundamental proposition of this discourse; the illustration must be provided by the Bible itself, and when we are sure that the Bible constantly appeals to the sense of the ridiculous and the absurd we must inquire why; and to that why a sufficient answer can be found.

Take the instance of the text: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" You must not read that in a schoolboy tone. The meaning of it is in the emphasis or in the very colour of the voice with which it is read. You could so read the inquiry as to destroy its energy, as to take out of it the mark of interrogation, and to leave it as absolutely without force or accent. You must import into the very method of reading the inquiry the tone of conscious sense of the ridiculous and the impossible. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an

unclean?"—it cannot be done, it stands to reason; it is against reason; the whole conception is absurd: who can do it? Thus we are left to smite at the very basis of some of the religious conceptions of the Bible and at some of the vital conceptions of the Christian religion. Read the verse in your own hearts; read it as if it meant to be an expression of the impossible; in the very tone of your voice you must find as it were an answer to the ridiculous suggestion. Bring a clean thing out of an unclean?—impossible! Bring a clean thing out of an unclean?—absurd! God must reduce us to that intellectual confusion before He can make anything good of us; He must empty our brains of all their sophisms, and put His foot upon them whilst they are crawling and sprawling on the ground, before He can begin to make men of us. We have made idols of our supposed reasoning faculties, and the very religion of God Himself must commend itself to our reasoning faculties before we can accept it! That is not the way of the Bible; the way of the Bible is to brand your reason, to smash it! This is God's way of making strong men; not feeble hesitant believers who have to ask somebody else why they believe such and such dogmas; this is not God's way. He does not say, Lock up in some secret cabinet the dogmas which you believe, and when the wind blows coldly and strongly in the face of your faith, take the key and open the cabinet, and taking out the dogmas read them, and be comforted, and then lock them up again. That is not faith; that is not manhood. What wonder if the world has gone infidel because of our diluted faith and our consultation of the narrow and empty oracles of so-called reason?

Take another instance, equally potent, and strikingly illustrative of the fundamental position of the discourse. You find it in John iii. 4: "How can a man be born when he is old?" You see the text does not stand alone; Job is corroborated by John. How can a man be born again when he is old? It does not stand to reason; it is ridiculous; I do not like to say so to this fair young man who has wrought all these wondrous miracles, but in my soul I feel that he is out

of his head, for he is an innocent or an inoffensive idealist; he dreams well, he talks badly. "Except a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Thus literalism confronts spiritualism, and they enter into their old and their eternal quarrel. Both the speakers were right, Nicodemus was right when he thought of birth as limited to the body and to the womb of the mother, and to all that is meant by fleshly manhood. Jesus Christ never talked of such low subjects; the Son of Man was in heaven; all He said was eternal. He took up the prose terms of time, and turned them into the poetic terms of heaven and eternity. A little child is of the nature of the kingdom of heaven. Yes; that is the reason why I baptise the little ones. Jesus Christ gives them their character, I ask no proxy-parents to give a character to these little people and a guarantee about their growing, for Jesus Christ puts them in my arms and says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Then they grow, develop, and go into another stage of manhood; then they show what they are in their quality, in their descent, and in their way of evolution; and then when they are grown-up men who think that they know what stands to reason, He says, "Ye must be born again"—born back again, born into the last childhood. Not born into controversialists and preachers and theologians and men who know about things after a certain pattern of ignorance; but ye must be born again in the sense of your hearts becoming childlike and your love unquestioning and simple and complete. Nicodemus, though a master in Israel, was a literalist; he knew only the alphabet, and then a few of the words, but his words never ran into poetry, never quivered into revelation and apocalypse and idealism. He was great within the four corners of the alphabet; outside of that alphabet he was weak as other men.

If these two texts stood alone they would point to a certain philosophy of human nature and to a certain philosophy of revelation; but they do not stand alone. I read in Jeremiah xiii. 23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Why, it stands to reason that he cannot, it is ridiculous to think that

he can, and yet this is what God is supposed to be calling upon man to do; why, it cannot be done! There you come upon the original difficulty; here is the appeal to the ridiculous with which we are so far familiarly acquainted; we saw it in Job, we heard it in John, and now we go back into the Old Testament and find Jeremiah suggesting or teaching the same doctrine, and making the same appeal to the ridiculous and the impossible. Christianity is an appeal to the impossible. There are some persons who go about the world trying to reconcile religion with the Bible, and faith with reason, and who are attempting to take all the poetry out of the Christian conception, and to reduce it to plain prose of ignorant knowledge and illogical reason. That is the reason why we lose power. We do not preach a religion, but a reconciliation of religion with something else. The definite, positive, incommunicable characteristics of religion we may easily withhold; and then the preacher will become a public lecturer, a very careful reader of his own little essays, neatly composed, and perhaps carefully committed to memory; but as for affrighting the devil and shaking hell, he cannot, for God is not with him. One of the first things you young ministers have to do is to make enemies. You have not to fall down upon one knee and kiss the extended sceptre of a reason that is really destitute of everything that is characteristic of the truly spiritual kingdom of God. It is not your business to reconcile an atheistic monthly review with the Gospel according to John. You think you are very clever in showing that the article upon non-theism is reconcilable with certain positions taken up by the Apostle Paul in that greatest and most elaborately argued of all his Epistles, he Epistle to the Romans. That is the reason you make no progress. What you have to do with the non-theistic article is to put it in the fire. The Epistle to the Romans does not ask you to reconcile it to the article. Believe me, that is the secret of real power, under the inspiration and benediction of the Three-one Godhead,—that you should stand to the peculiar dogmas, whatever may become of the proverbs and the articles which have gathered around the much misunderstood and much abused term, human reason.

If these three instances stood alone we might look upon them as in some sense accidental and as being marginal rather than being intended for incorporation in the sacred text; but they do not stand alone. I will go back to John, and in chapter vi. 52 I will find the same appeal made to the ridiculous. They said, Here, He is getting worse and worse; how can this man give us His flesh to eat? Why, there is only so much of it, and there are so many of us; why, it stands to reason that the thing cannot be done; this dreamer is falling into nightmare: how can it be done? Men, did you hear Him? He said He would give us His flesh to eat: What further need have we of evidence of His lunacy? The thing is impossible on the face of it; it stands to reason that His whole suggestion is simply absurd,—How? how? how? You have to meet that same How? to-day. The man whose watchword is How? has been living all the time and never getting an answer that could satisfy his intellectual vanity. But a man will say, How will the dead be raised up? how? And here the people, being left in the hands of the literalists, described as the Pharisees, brought up within the four corners of their own theological or dogmatic alphabet, they, hearing Jesus say He will give the world His flesh to eat, simply start aside and take a kind of personal offence, and think it is scarcely respectable to be associated with a Man who can talk such a language; and, turning to one another, they say, How can He do it? the thing stands to reason that He cannot do it; let us leave Him, let us follow after men who talk prose; it is all very well to hear this kind of speaking; His voice is as that of a pleasant instrument, no doubt gracious words will proceed out of His mouth, we can stand Him up to a certain point; but when it comes to this, that He is going to give us His flesh to eat, why, it is ridiculous, perfectly absurd on the face of it; let us go! Jesus said to those who were nearest to Him, “Will ye also go away?” The more spiritual He became, the less His congregation became. You will often find that in your own ministrations the more anecdotal you are and old-wifely in relating stories that never occurred, the more popular you will be. Oh! to be popular is to be self-despised. But the more spiritual you become

you will find men drop away one by one; they do not understand spirituality; they understand miracles, sights, wonders, loaves, fishes—all that is perfectly understandable by such minds: but when you begin the higher truths, and work by symbols, and then work away from symbols into spiritual shadows, and when the whole universe becomes so sensitive that a breath, even when not loaded with a word, can disturb it, you will find men leaving you as they left the Saviour: but by that sign you may sometimes know that you are growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If these four instances stood alone we might somehow try at least to evade them; but they do not stand alone. If you go to John vii. 43, you will find this question pregnant with the same spirit, "Have any of the elders or the Pharisees believed on Him?" It is all very well for you ignorant men to believe upon this Jesus of Nazareth, but there are men amongst us who are scholars, great scholars, men who have read the law from their youth, men who have understanding of intellectual and historical difficulties and processes: I ask you, Have any of them believed on your young Idealist? Not one amongst them; why, it stands to reason, it is simply ridiculous; there is not a man attached to Him at this moment who has any high place in the synagogue; even those who admire Him a little, and even those who think that some of His words are beautiful as crystal is beautiful, cannot endorse Him, He carries with Him no certificate from their learned fingers; why, it stands to reason that the whole thing is ridiculous: do you suppose that if a man had a true and great philosophy of life and great and true philosophy of God, that the scribes and the elders and the Pharisees and the legalists would not be able to examine His credentials and to pronounce upon them? And yet they all fight shy of this Man, they go elsewhere, they will not speak roughly about Him just yet, but there is gathering within them something that will some day tear Him to pieces, murder Him on the Cross. Such men will have their justification because of the ridiculousness of the positions which He asks us to accept.

Shall we take just one more instance? We shall find it also in John, chapter xii. 34—"Who is this Son of Man?" You must read that verse not as if you were in clerk's orders, not as if you were reading something that had not a peculiar laugh in the heart of it. Many a time the laugh or the bitter irony or acid satire may be found in the thing itself, rather than in the way in which it is spoken or delivered; this is one of the cases. "Who is this Son of Man?" Now, when all comes to all, who is He? where is His property? where is His pedigree? where is His social influence? what right has He to be at the head even of a mob? who is He? has anybody caught the family signature on a rag of linen? has any washerwoman in the whole land seen the initials of the family name upon some rag of calico? after all, who is this Son of Man? He comes to revolutionise, to turn things all upside down. He says, "It hath been said to you by them of old time . . . but I say to you"—now the whole question simply turns upon this one inquiry, Who is this Son of Man?

So you will find from the beginning of the Bible to the end inquiries that suggest an appeal to the ridiculous. When men wish to disobey God or when men want to get rid of the Christ, they will say, The incarnation?—why, it stands to reason that the incarnation, as it is usually understood, is quite a mistake, something worse than a dream; that God, eternal, omnipotent, infinite, majestic beyond all conceived majesty, should become a little crying babe in the manger or a stable, why, it is surprising that the world could tolerate the notion for one little moment. So it is, and the world never can entertain it; but this is not an appeal to the world, this is an appeal to the world that is within the world and above the world, and that will outlast it. Do you suppose that we have got our little vessel, and that if the great Atlantic will not go into this little vessel it is not an Atlantic? If you make an appeal to cold, narrow, literal reason, I can see how in many quarters Christianity could be wounded and disabled, but it is not an appeal to the literal and cold reason. Jesus Christ always addresses Himself to a word that is so little understood. Would God all the ministers in the world would explain it in

their next discourse! Jesus Christ came and addressed His appeal to faith. And faith itself must often be ridiculous to reason, that is, to narrow, uncultivated and unsanctified reason; but to reason, when God has undertaken its sanctification, faith is the culmination of reason, the very glory of logic. Do not, young preacher, be disheartened when people laugh at your Christian tenets and smile at your Christian ministries and leave your Christian expositions and appeals, and go away into the fields in order to have for their companionship their own reason. The difficulty is often this, that when an appeal is made to reason, we have to raise the inquiry, Whose reason? Not mine, not yours, then whose? Who will be parent to this orphan? Faith is essential to salvation. Faith is glorified reason, reason *plus*, and that *plus* is infinite. Lord, increase our faith!

We have great difficulties in this ministry. We have to ask people to believe in the invisible, and they do not like to believe in the ghostly and the unseen. We have to tell men that if they will follow Christ, they will gain their life by losing it; and they say, It stands to reason that such a proposition is ridiculous. We have to say to the world, If you will enter the kingdom of heaven, you must become strangers and pilgrims on the earth. And they say, It is a hard saying, who can hear it? Everything is against the Christian ministry. You go into the heathen world, and as soon as ever the heathen people begin to understand you they will find out that you want to tear to pieces all that they have been relying upon, and substitute for their so-called religion a revelation and incarnation, an almost visible God, a God who saves by the blood of His own heart, a religion whose badge is a Cross. What wonder if they murder you? What wonder the grand missionary cause has had its imperishable martyrs? And if we would be faithful to the spiritual side of religion, we should finally draw upon ourselves the taunt that we often speak things unbelievable and ridiculous, mayhap absurd. And if we have escaped persecution, it may be because we have escaped the truth. He who is faithful unto death may have to bear many a taunt. But his vindication is in eternity. Wait!

[*Sunday Morning, 7th January, 1900.*]

Prayer.

WE will look unto the years that are at Thy right hand, Thou King of Eternity and Distributor of Time. Men come and go, Thy throne abideth for ever ; all flesh is grass, the flower of the field withereth, but the Word of the Lord continueth from age to age. We will think of the fleeting and we will think of the eternal, and we will be calm ; we will measure what comes and goes, and then we will look at that which abides for ever, and we shall remember that our light affliction is but for a moment, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, the mere creatures of time, the breath of the dying moment ; but the things which are not seen are eternal. May we see the unseen, may we endure as seeing the invisible, may we live the inner and spiritual and immortal life ! We would not recall the years that are gone, because with them we should recall our sins, and Thou wilt not permit us to go back over the ground we have traversed and bring back only the flowers and the songs and the times of joy and high delight, Thou wilt not allow us thus to treat the past. Therefore would we not go back upon all the yesterdays and bring again to our memory and to our responsibility all our sins and errors and falsehoods spoken and acted : let the dead bury their dead ; let the years that are gone dig their own graves and sing their own requiem. We would live in Thy present and Thy future, and would already, by reason of the triumph of faith, be in heaven, joining the angels' song. If we think of the past it is to think of Thy mercy, Thy tenderness, Thy lovingkindness, and to say concerning each, oh, how great—how great is God not only in power but in pity, not only in majesty but in condescension ! We humbly pray Thee to give us the right view of Thy greatness, that we may not be amazed and dazzled by mere radiance, but may be drawn to contemplate the tenderness and the love, the stooping and the pity, the bread and the care, and the nightly sleep. We remember how Thou hast conducted us during the year, and how poorly we have received the instruction of heaven ; but Thou wilt not set down our rebellion as sin, but as a sign of ignorance and impatience ; Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust, and Thou wilt not be harsh with us, yea, rather Thou wilt find some apology for our weakness, for Thou knowest that we are but men. The Lord help us in the future, so short to some, so long to others, so uncertain to all, for we know not what a day may bring forth. We would know nothing about the days, we would heed no passing and measurable time ; we would think of the years that are at Thy right hand, we would establish ourselves in the

strength of Thy righteousness and in the certainty of Thy promises, and would grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, being grievously wounded by the world, but being healed and comforted and sent forth in manhood again by Thy grace and by Thy Spirit. Thou art weaning us from the present and the visible and the measurable ; Thou dost wean us gently, a moment at a time dost Thou wean us from the things we thought so great, so essential, and even final in their plenteousness. Thou art taking us to a broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and Thou hast promised to be with us though the way be a wilderness, and though the trial be a trial by water, by river, or sea. So we stand in God, so we rest in the Most High ; we will no more be discomfited by our unfaith and by our worldliness. Thou hast taken some through deep waters ; the grave they dug has hardly yet been filled in, and no time has been given for the growth of the first daisy ; they were in the graveyard but yesterday, and to-day they are seeking rest elsewhere than in their accustomed society, where we have often together sung the psalm and hymn of praise and thankfulness. The Lord's grace be multiplied to them exceedingly, and may their healing be quickly done, because done by the Master Himself. And some to-day take the sacramental sign for the first time ; they have just given themselves to Jesus and proclaimed themselves followers of His red banner ; this morning they will break the bread and drink the symbolical cup, and they give themselves to Thee in this sweet, holy act ; and may they never withdraw from the plough, but constantly and lovingly renew their vow and their testimony, showing that they are growing in manhood. And if the year just born is to be another year of weariness to some, real unmanning weariness, without light or hope or music, say to such souls, It is but another year. Thou hast made the years measurable, that we may get the best out of them ; they are not long-drawn and incalculable, they come and they go. Say so to souls that are nearly wearied out, and are just now on the brink of leaving Thee and almost hating Thee. Thou knowest the strength of the adversary's hold, but Thy hold is stronger still, and we come, smitten ones and sore wounded, to Thy care and Thy pity : Thou knowest all things. Give each of us some rose of Sharon, some clump of lilies from the warmest valley, a New Year's gift from heaven, fresh gathered in the upper places by angel hands, and wet with dewy jewels. The Lord speak to us as we have need to be spoken to, and recover some joy, or bring it in a new form, express it in a new way ; and, whatever we lose, let us not lose our faith !

The Lord hear us at the Cross, in Whose name we pray, to Whose blood we trust. Amen.

HANDS AND SIDE.

"He shewed unto them His hands and His side."—JOHN XX. 20.



HE knew the littleness and poverty of the poor creatures, He knew the kind of thing that would suit them; He stooped to their poor level. But this is His way; He always does the same thing. He sits down where we sit down, He speaks our mother tongue; and, if He lifts up the argument to its right level, it is not to frighten us but to show us that the sky is higher than the earth. What a wondrous teacher, preacher, poet! What can these people understand? Wounds. Where can they begin the great spiritual argument? At loaves and fishes. Then I must begin where they can begin. So He said, and so He gave the all-including lesson to all teachers and preachers, whether in the pulpit, or in the school, or in the family, or in the university. It is only men who have no call to teach or preach who say, The people must come up to me. Poor vanity! would God we had swords sharp enough to cut it in two! The Great Teacher says, Where are the scholars? I must go down to them. He made Himself of no reputation, He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; He took upon Him the form of a servant that He might do the work of a master. This is the very genius of love, this is the deity of compassion.

"He shewed unto them His hands and His side."
 "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." And they looked white one at another, they paled away from that weird figure. He saw it. At a glance He sees everything. Having

seen this faithless trembling fear, He showed them His hands, and laid those hands meaningly on His side. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord," saw Him through the visible, saw Him through the red wounds, saw Him in the old way of miracle, and heard Him in the old way of parable. He meant higher things; His own mind was a whole universe beyond the mere figure or symbol which He supplied. But He always began where anybody else could begin. He never began teaching reading in words of five syllables; Jesus Christ began by teaching the alphabet, and then by combining two letters, and then three, and making syllables, and so passing on into a literature that never can be completed. What an argument this was! though not put in the form of a logical statement. You can regard it as a picture or you can estimate it as a poem, but I prefer in this instance at least to regard it as an argument, one of those cast-iron arguments that no wind can blow down; gather around that great strength what you please or what you can, but never touch the internal and the imperishable structure.

It was a silent argument. Can you find logic in silence? Yes, truly; hardly anywhere else. It is a curse to man that he can talk! How do you interpret that friend of yours with whom you have been so long familiar? He seems depressed: can you read that cypher? Is this his old self that first won you? No, truly, it is not; it is anything but his old self. Will he speak? Not a word; but how he looks! He has only lost speech in one way that he may enhance it in another. What he must have gone through to look as he looks to-day! Let us sit down beside the man and read the riddle. Has he lost his money? his friend? his land? his hope? or, greatest loss of all, has he lost his faith? He will not speak to us, but he shows us his depression. Oh that he would speak! even if brokenly, it would do my heart good to hear him sobbing his grief. It is deeper than sobbing, it strains the whole man; it is deeper than grief, it burns the tear-valves and leaves him powerless. You have read the sufferer well; it is even so. Why, this man was the most cheerful of the company, we looked to him always for vivacity, for the flash and the sparkle and

the word that stirred the pool into which cripples might plunge and come out strong men. Look at him to-day ! not a word ! but we can read the meaning of such misery. If he were to speak he would lose it, and if he lost his misery he would lose his only joy at this moment ; for misery can be transfigured, and there is a companionship that does not figure and babble.

It is a visible argument, as well as a silent one. "He shewed unto them His hands and His side." Not a word was spoken, not a word was needed. They are poor lilies that you can paint, they are poor circles that you can improve. Can you read me the riddle of this silence ? Look at it, for it is a silence that may be felt ; it is no ordinary silence, it is a silence visible, silence sculptured, silence that looks at you. Let us watch this man. If ever he is looking round, pay no attention to him ; when he it even mutely recognising any address that is made to him, pay no heed to his expression of countenance : but when that face is in repose watch it with your hearts. Not when the man is trying to speak is he his real very self, but when you are paying no heed to him and when you suddenly turn upon him and find him in repose—ah ! What plough ripped those lines ? what fire singed that youthful manhood ? what misery tore down that mouth and made it all grief-lines ? Need we ask him what the matter is ? then would we wound our friend. Saith he in his very silence and visibleness, If you cannot see what ails me, do not ask ; what, have you no eye for misery ? are you those frivolous people who can only enjoy themselves when they are in the midst of rattle and noise, one uproar succeeding another ? Poor are ye, yea and most miserable creatures, for whom no habitation ought to be found on the face of the habitable and civilised globe ; yours is not living. If you went along the streets, and watched the silent visible grief, you would have novel and fiction and drama and poem enough for the rest of your lifetime. What does that poor creature mean standing at the street-corner there ? She looks like a ruin, like the most pathetic of all ruins, the ruin of a once innocent flower-like

girlhood! she is saying nothing, but she is a living curse upon somebody. So through all the evolution of the day's tale and story and drama, you have not only the silent argument, but the visible argument, the face argument, the very stoop of premature old age, the withered hand that yet retains its shapeliness, but can no longer lift the old weight and swing it in the air. Yea, for such sights who has eyes keen enough, who has eyes that can look without staring, who has that poet's vision that sees it all and takes no audible notice of it? It is a wondrous gift, wondrous as redeeming grace. Some people think you do not observe or recognise their painful condition unless you babble about it, unless you make a loquacious anecdote about it, unless you turn their grief into gossip, unless you murder them again to prove that they were really alive. "He showed unto them His hands and His side," and in so showing them His wounds He seemed to say, See the proof, see the argument, see the pleading, and do not ask Me to put it into words, for words spoil all things. The great things are hidden from words. God hides Himself from words, lest they should describe Him; and so does love, and so does grief.

It was not only a silent argument, and a visible argument, it was emphatically a personal argument. Not an argument which the man carried about with him as a great feat of memory, remembering all the reticulations and relationships of the wordy strife, a difficult and intricate controversy, something that might easily slip out of the memory, because it had only been put into the memory: poor sermons and poor arguments and poor poems! But an argument which the man had lived; the man was the argument. Jesus Christ was the Gospel. What was the most familiar word which our dear Lord used? A word which God Himself spoke long time since to Moses. Moses and the Lamb—almost identical; there is to be a song called The Song of Moses and the Lamb. What was the most familiar word which Jesus used in speaking of Himself? "I am." Why, that greatest of all names we read in Exodus. Yes; it came into the world the very moment that the world was able to receive it. The verb To be, the living verb, the verb never to

be conjugated, and yet to be broken up into moods and tenses for immediate use, as we break up the harvest into little loaves and crumbs that might easily fall out of the hand. So Jesus Christ used this picture-word, I AM. At first we read I AM THAT I AM ; and again, I AM hath sent Me unto you. Jesus Christ hardly ever ceased to use that word in some form :—I am the light of the world ; I am the bread sent down from heaven ; I am the good Shepherd ; I am the true Vine. So He set that great name I AM in front, so to say, of every speech and parable, and made it live with eternity. So He might have said, I am the Gospel ; I do not preach the Gospel only, I am the Gospel which I preach. Hence we say this was a personal argument ; it belonged to Himself ; He individualised it, and thus glorified it. We must do the same in our little degree, in our humble way. When we want to prove that we have been with Christ we must in our sense show inquirers our hands and our side ; that is to say, we must show the crucifixion we have undergone, we must show the great red wounds. Christianity is not a trick in rhetoric ; it is a miracle in death. We must not show our catechisms and our ordinances and our little habits and small regularities and schedules and rearrangements of family life ; all these do thou take and cast into the fire, if there be not something other, deeper, better. You have read the great speech of the man who held up the robe of Cæsar, and cried, See what a rent ! behold what a tearing ! We must do that, but in another mood and in a loftier style ; we must bring that old passion we have and hold it up beside the Cross, and must say without words, repeating the silent but the visible argument, See what a gash is here ! a sword-gash that went through that foul appetite and slew it. We must break up our intellectual vanity, the thing on which we prided ourselves and for which we were in some degree praised by other people, and we must, holding it up, as a silent and yet visible argument, say, See how the sword of the Spirit has cut my intellectual vanity in two, and levelled me with the dust, and made me simple and unpretending as a little child that does not know even its own name ; there is the wound, that is the wound ; it was through that in-

tellectual vanity that the cold steel, so to say, wrought its way, cutting every fibre, and making it bleed at every pore, and now it is dead. We must show them our hands and our side.

It was not only a silent argument, a visible argument, a personal argument, but it was a pathetic argument. Pathos will always have its place in the ministry of human life. Where one man thrives on satire and makes a fortune out of laughing at the foibles of the world, ten thousand men who know the meaning of tears and can sanctify grief by the power of the Holy Spirit, will be welcomed with tender appreciation. Any beast can tread on your father's grave, but it requires a man of tender heart to read the parable of the tomb and to expend upon your hearts redeemingly and comfortingly all the pathos of your great bereavement. Can you read me the meaning of that bent back? I think so: that man has seen much life; he has not seen life much on the sunny side; his children may have grown up about him and taken their departure and left the hearthstone as lonely as it once was; or some of his children may be dead, and some twice dead and seven times dead by reason of prodigality and hard-heartedness and rebellion and unfilial behaviour. Oh that poor bent back! He should not have gone out this morning to the field, he should have remained at home, and tender hearts should have ministered to him, but he had to go, he must work for his food before he can eat it. But at that age, surely, he might have had food enough laid up in store. But he has all the appearance of being weather-beaten and comfortless. What say you if we accompany him and see whether he has a home to go to, or some poor canvas shelter borrowed from a generous neighbour, or some poor thatched cot with hardly a window and without a chimney, and he must live in the smothering smoke. Is that your reading of the living riddle? It is; and it can be substantiated by thousands upon thousands of living instances. It is even so that we may cause the Christian life to be interpreted by our own instance and example. Let us watch the truly crucified man who has been with Christ in death, and risen with Christ into immortal life: how cheerful, how piously

and delightfully vivacious; why, all the depression seems to have been wrought out of him; his very grief is an expression of subtle joy! That man is a new creature in Christ Jesus; he goes about doing good; he could not sleep if he had not made some heart happier than it was this morning; it would be a poor day to him if he did not make some little child gurgle and laugh and play. Why does he do it? For Christ's sake. How does he do it? In Christ's strength. He says, I can do all things through Christ which enableth or strengtheneth me. And it is so that the Christian must show his hands and his side, and thus set up a silent, visible, personal, pathetic argument, which men cannot answer in words, they can only answer in the eloquence of imitation.

This is the argument that is alone complete; this is the argument that can go all over the world; this is the argument that can live and work its grand and beneficent way in what may be called dumb signs and symbols; this is the argument that needs no translation; this the great logic that needs no study of foreign languages, in which the great argument may sometimes be lost. There is a way of being a missionary without speaking a word, a way of being a missionary in love, in charity, in sympathy, in beneficence, in obeying the look of the eye, in serving the mute cry of necessity and pain: a great ministry without a word. You could take a thorn out of a dog's paw without troubling the suffering beast with some elaborate argument, either in philosophy or theology; the poor beast would know what you are doing; there is a way of touching the wounded part that means, I won't hurt you more than I can possibly help; now I want to take this thorn out of your foot, I stroke your head in sign of my intention. And the dog will know it. There is a way of helping a man without preaching at him. There is a way of declaring the Gospel of Christ without introducing any controversial tone; and if the Gospel be so introduced the man who receives it will say to you, Speak on! oh tell me more! abide with me, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent; tell me how you came to do this deed, how you came to bear that awful suffering almost joyously. How did you

get the victory over the grave, and wave a palm over the final foe? You see, by the deed we attract attention; attention having been arrested, we may begin the talking, the expounding, the educating, the preaching. But blessed is he who first masters the heart by some silent, visible, personal, pathetic argument; for then the heart gives him liberty, and says, Use me, help me further. And thus Jesus Christ gave His body that He might afterwards get His very soul into the minds of those whom He had benefited. That is the New Year's word. May we hear it in all the days.

[*Thursday Morning, 11th January, 1900.*]

Prayer.

ALmighty GOD, we thank Thee when we come to the end of our strength that we may know how small we are and how feeble and utterly unworthy. Thou hast a purpose in our reduction ; we know now that when Thou dost make us little we are on the point of being made great. We have discovered by Thy Spirit the way of the Lord, Thy method and scheme of things, and we are beginning to know that Thy words are not our words, that Thy way is not our way, that as the heavens are high above the earth, so are Thy ways and Thy thoughts beyond ours altogether. Thou dost blind us in order to give us sight ; Thou dost humble us that Thou mayest afterwards set us upon a pedestal, that we may be seen afar like a light shining over the sea. We now see somewhat of Thy way ; we thought it was the ordinary way, something like our way, and so it is until it becomes utterly unlike it, and Thou dost stand forth alone, the God of the whole earth. Make us great students of Thy Word this year ; may we long for it as hunger longs for bread, may we desire it with an exceeding desire, that we may realise the promise which could be conceived and executed only by infinite wisdom. Blessed are they that hunger : for they shall be filled. Lord, evermore give us the true bread ; Lord, evermore give us the true wine, which is Thine own blood, taken in symbol and received in faith ; that we may grow in strength and in beauty and in general fitness to handle all the difficulties of life. We live in God ; without God we cannot live ; and we only know Thee through Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour, our peace, our reconciliation, our atonement ; that greatest of all quantities and magnitudes, for which there are no words. But we fall down before the Cross, and when we put our arms around it, it is as if we would put those same arms round Thine own heart. Amen.

WITH WHAT COMPARISON.

"With what comparison shall we compare it?"—MARK iv. 30.



MAN must have comparisons. He is a born parabolist; it may take another kind of man to put the parable into shape, but the parable, as to its substance and essence, is in every child and every heart. He is always seeking for a likeness, a comparison, something which will tell of something else than itself. It is peculiarly and eternally so *in* the kingdom of God; it takes up all other subjects, and uses them by first mocking them, by bringing them, in some instances, into ridicule, in order that it may point out the greatness of something else quite beyond words and quite beyond the region of visible picture. We must discover in this, as in all other respects, the way of the Lord. There is a genius of the divine speech; many a time the Lord sets Himself quite beyond dictionaries and word-explaining books, and He treats them as if with mockery and fine disdain: He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at our words, and the most High shall have them in derision. Yet we are so fond of words that we make a livelihood by their treatment. Some of us would have no living at all if we could not tear words about and set them in divers lights and in contrastive relations; every man proving absolutely that every other man is wrong wherein he differs from the immediate speaker: and we ought to be careful how we handle anything that has a more or less innocent livelihood in it.

"With what comparison shall we compare it?" Sometimes the Lord makes a great deal of the comparison; then He tramples it under foot, and as soon as He has got His own idea driven into our all but impenetrable minds He throws the parable away as

He has thrown away the miracle; but He has secured for us an entrance into the kingdom of God. It is a wonderful way of the Lord, this. He makes one thing little in order that He may make some other thing great, and He does this as it were on a consistent principle. We must endeavour to discover what that principle is: the door of the Lord's school-house must be found, and we must enter in by the door and by no other way, otherwise we shall have babel upon babel, and darkness shall succeed darkness like the billows of a black sea. Comparison has been the instrument of education along the whole biblical line, breaking out now and then into larger and better pictures, but all the time having a kind of photograph by which to explain the divine meaning. God's literature is a great illustrated book, and the author is the artist, and other artist there could be none. If we miss the point of the illustration the text will oftentimes be but a darkness. Once upon a time a man started out to make comparisons, and suggestions based upon them. He began wisely, in a cunning marketplace kind of way, because he had to deal with commercial minds that never saw poetry in arithmetic. So he said to them, "You know the merchandise of silver?" And the answer was, "Certainly; we live by getting silver and bartering it." "And you know something about fine gold?" "Oh! certainly; these are our favourite metals." "Well, I am going to tell about something compared with which both these silver and gold are nothing." He was a mighty crafty speaker; he knew how to arrest the attention of men, and bring them up standing to know what this new vision was and this richer, lordlier thing. He had to stoop to their tin minds, silver minds, gold minds, and when he had filled them with the idea materialistic he said, "Now what I am going to tell you about is infinitely greater than these." The people naturally answered, "No; thou wilt be telling us presently that it is greater and more precious than the jewel-stone." "Yes," is the answer, "that is just what I was coming to; for she is more precious than rubies." Then attention fell into disbelief. "And all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared with her"; and there went up a laugh of ridicule, the thing was so obviously ridiculous and unimaginable.

Thus we get little by little into the way or the method of the Lord. Presently we shall begin to see that when He says bread He means bread for the soul; presently we shall begin to see that when He uses the instrument called miracle He does not care about healing our eyesight or our ankle-bones or leprous skin; all these things will fall away in a few moments; He wants to get at and into the soul. Unless we understand the way of Jesus He will often be a serious riddle and puzzling enigma to us, and we shall say, We cannot tell what this man saith; He saith that in a little time He will not see us, and again in a little time He will see us; and we cannot tell what He says. Quite right. He breaks all our little toy-words to pieces and grinds them under the sole of His foot; and they, thinking that their words express everything, begin to chafe under this new teaching; and some said that He was mad, and some said that it thundered, and they all said, What manner of man is this? There is a great danger of falling into our own way and thinking there is no other. That is unselfish and humble, is it not? How delightfully self-forgetting we are! A man speaks in a way that we have never heard before, and we naturally think that the man is insane: there can be no great harm in that, can there? They say that the madman thinks all the world mad. Herein our dear Lord has been crucified by the word-mongers; they have not understood His way. They said, "It is because we have brought no bread that He is rebuking us in this manner." And He said, "No, I am not speaking of loaves, what you call bread; I am speaking about the sustenance of the soul: beware of the doctrine, the idea, the new genius of things which is no genius but a stale insanity."

Let us follow in an instance or two this way of the Lord. See how we are endeavouring to enlarge the word "way." We always think of the way of the Lord as something metaphysical, transcendental, something never to be discovered and hardly ever to be dreamed or even imagined in outline. There are directions in which that is perfectly true, but the Lord has a way amongst our words, our sentences; He takes our plain verbal supper-words and breaks

them into sacramental symbols, and says, This is the meaning of the bread—flesh! this is the meaning of the sour supper wine—blood! It is very strange and ghostly. Let us, I repeat, take an instance or two in which God enables us to reduce one thing that we may be able to see the right proportions of another. In this new rhetoric man may have to go down for a time, man may have to lie so low in the deep valley as to be almost without presence and visibleness, in order that he may see the right proportion of things. Take Psalm xxii. 6, "I am a worm, and no man." That is not true; yet in a certain relation it is perfectly true. A man who feels himself to be a worm and no man is probably more a man at that moment than he ever was before. Reduction may mean revelation; extinction in words may mean resurrection in possibility and ideal and hope. In this Psalm xxii. 6 the idea is not to reduce man but to magnify God. We must not break up the quotation in the middle, because we shall get no meaning either first or last. "I am a worm"; that is not true. "I am no man"; that is not a fact. You must not break the Bible up into texts. Texts have been the ruin of the pulpit. Who invented the word "text"? And yet there goes no poor woman back to her house after a religious service but somebody will say to her, if the subject be referred to at all, "What was the text?" Beware! texts are nuisances, texts are mistakes; texts are in danger of magnifying the fraction above the integer. I do not want a text, I want a theme; not a versicle, but a Bible; and not a Bible in the sense of a book, but a revelation, an incoming and outflowing of the divine spirit and intent.

Take Genesis xviii. 27. Abraham said, "I am but dust and ashes." That is not true; yet relatively, and with a strict eye upon the purpose of God in coming to speak to His servants it is absolutely true, as we call "absolutely." Absolutely is a word no man has any right to use; he does not know its meaning; what he thinks is absolute may be but the beginning of things, a mere germ and hint of the great truth. Still, man is fond of the word; and who would take a stick of barley sugar from a child?

"I am but dust and ashes." The psalmist was "a worm." What was the idea of these reductions? A certain magnifying on the other and upper side. Man reduces himself that he may get some idea of the greatness of God. Comparing ourselves with ourselves, what wise men we are! and we appoint a few of our wiser selves as a sub-committee to report upon something which is absolutely, as we say, of no consequence whatsoever: and thus we hinder God's Church and reduce the stature of the Cross. Abraham wanted to say something, and he apologised for his own existence before he began the utterance of his prayer. This was wrong,—this was right: everything depends upon the point of view and the purpose that ruled the man's heart at the time. A little god means a little prayer; a small conception of God means the reduction of human intellect itself. Agnosticism cannot breed great men. Having fallen in his own estimate and seen the greatness of God, he thinks he will pray a little. That is the right issue of divine knowledge,—to pray in a timid, tremulous, tearful voice. Will the Almighty hear me? I dare not lift up my mouth unto the heaven, I can only drop mine eyes upon the earth, because I am a sinner; but if I confess my sin and put myself in a right relation to God I shall begin to pray, and when I open mine eyes I may find that they are not on the dust but on the suns and stars of the heavens,—ay, and beyond them, up where the throne is and the listening God. If a man makes himself a frail little creature before his fellow-men, he is a liar and the truth is not in him; there is a humility that is the basest pride: but if a man shall make himself nothing in the presence of God he is on the way towards Christian and availing prayer.

Once a great prophet (Isaiah xl. 15) took the nations in hand. That is the way of the true religion, to alter the unit of speech. So the great prophet Isaiah, who burned like a mountain of the Lord, said to us, in effect: Sirs, your poor imaginations are bewildered by empires and peoples and dynasties; hear me: The nations of the earth are as a drop of a bucket compared with the God of nations. Was he reducing the nations? Certainly not. What was he doing then? He was reducing the nations that he might by their

reduction show, so far as is possible, Almighty God in a right proportion; he made man little that he might make God great; he made the nations trembling drops that he might magnify the firmament on which rests the throne. This is the way of the Lord; if we seize it intelligently and devotedly it will help us through many a difficulty; it will explain many an apparent discrepancy.

In one of His parables (Matt. xxii. 3) the Lord used an expression which has in its very heart this same idea, and the expression is a very simple one; many men have gabbled it over and made nothing of it, as is their way, poor wastrels, knowing not that they are walking upon God and breathing revelations. Saith the Lord, "And they would not come." A child could understand those words. Yes, and No. Was it a mere detention? Did the people who received the invitation write, so to say, to the host of the house in the third person, and politely, on the ground of indisposition or pre-occupation, decline the invitation to his hospitable table? No; the words really employed show that the heart answered the invitation, and by a criminal obstinacy set itself against the king and his feast and his house; it was an example of moral and impenetrable obduracy: We hate you and your feast, and we deliberately say we will not come. So there are two different ways of treating the Lord's religion which is set forth in these comparative-sermons called the parables. Some persons politely decline the Deity; they are a peculiar kind of human nature; they are not uncivil to the Almighty, they do not hotly disdain the temple of the Lord; they say that they know nothing about it, they decline to enter into such subjects, they would rather talk of bulls and of calves (to quote the Apocrypha) than they would talk about what some persons called the kingdom of God; but they do it with great politeness; they decline heaven on gilt-edged paper, and in the third person, often concluding with Yours Truly. That is one sort. There are others whose heart is set in them to fight God, who send messages after Him so to say, declaring, We will not have Christ to rule over us; we have made up our minds upon this point; we hate the Infinite, we

abominate the Eternal, we despise the Divine. These are the people who fight against God, and rage, the heathen who imagine a vain thing. In the parable (Matthew xxii. 3) the people expressed a distinct determination, an unutterable moral aversion; they will not receive the invitation or respond to it.

Thus we see something of the way of the Lord's speech. There is a beautiful instance, viewed from the opposite standpoint, in which the Apostle Paul magnifies that which is wrong in order just to give a little standing room to that which is right. This is the inverse method of treating the way of the Lord. Said the great Apostle, "I am the chief of sinners." What is he going to say next? "I am less than the least of all the saints. That you may have some little idea of how small I am in the kingdom of grace, I tell you again and again that I am the chief of sinners, the very largest sinner that ever breathed, and yet by the mercy of God I have been enabled just to begin the divine stature; do not compare me with a child, I am less than the least of the saints of God; I have not come to the point where relative stature can be recognised, yet I feel that I am in the kingdom of God the very least of the souls that sing the upper music; and what more can I be, remembering that by comparison I am the chief of sinners?" Why does the Apostle Paul reduce himself? That he may magnify his Saviour. Jesus, said he in effect, saved me; therefore there is hope for all mankind: Jesus stooped to my awful condition, my fearful, lost, miserable condition, and I make myself out to be so great a sinner that I may tell you, so far as comparison will enable me to illustrate the case, how great a Saviour Jesus is. Read the passage aright, and you will get quite a new meaning upon it. "Sinners, of whom I am chief." That is not the meaning of it. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of which saved sinners I am chief; the Lord never took such prey as He took at the spear-point when He smote me and lifted me up into His chariot that He might carry me as a sign of His triumph through the ages.

Thus you see somewhat of the way of the Lord,

God first belittles that He may afterwards magnify. That is the effect of all great examples. If you have been living amongst little folks you are no doubt a little creature. How immense the giraffe must look when he has nobody about to compare with except a few sheep! You ought to be taken out of that relation and placed where you will have some notion of your true size, which is very small, and you ought to live in a great metropolis in which you will no longer be the provincial grand figure but a number in a hotel on the third floor: one month of that would make the beginning of a Christian of you. This is the Lord's way; He takes us into a new atmosphere, a new relationship, and measures us by a new standard. Comparing ourselves with ourselves we become very wise; but comparing ourselves with God, we are foolish and men of no understanding. When the Lord magnifies Himself against us it is not really to reduce us, but to bring us into that temper of mind in which we can receive a just revelation of our own personality; He reduces us to nothingness in our own esteem that He may afterwards put us together again, and begin by the power of the grace of the Cross to build us up in the true manhood. It is the effect of all great examples to reduce a man for a time. Looking at the great works of art, he says, No! I will give away my palette and my brush. By and bye there comes into him a spirit which follows true humility and seals it, and he says in swelling humility, often mistaken for pride, I too am a painter. It is the effect of great examples, first to humble us and almost utterly to crush us; then the better spirit succeeds, and the man who could do nothing cries out, I can do all things through Christ which enables or strengthens me. It does us good to measure ourselves by the truly great, that we may be reduced in personal vanity, and then be prepared to receive the right spiritual impression and to accept the calling of divine grace.

God makes use of contrasts that He may reveal the Source of all strength. Here is a great work to be done, and God calls to it little children. The picture is a picture of ridicule; we say, Where is the proportion? This great work is to be constructed, and a

number of little children have been called to do it. God's way! God hath chosen the weak things of this world, God hath chosen the foolish things of this world, God hath chosen things that are not, that no flesh should glory in His presence, but reveal Himself as the true source of strength. If our warriors would fall a praying they would do something. If the Lord chooses little creatures to do His work in the kingdom of Christ, then there may be a chance for me; if weak men are called, then I may be called. If things that are foolish are called then things that I have esteemed foolish may be my wisest and richest things; I cannot tell: but here is the divine way or method, and this gives a chance to every one of us, the small and the great. The weak may be mighty. Oh, sir! call thou upon God, and drop the robe of thy vanity and the flaccid muscle of thine utter inability.

And then, thirdly, God uses the partially impossible to magnify the essentially impossible. The great Teacher says, Heaven and earth shall pass away—meaning they shall not pass away—but My word shall not pass away. The mountains shall melt—yet they will not melt—the meaning is, Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than My word shall pass away: sooner shall the partially impossible become the actually impossible than My word shall cease to be the life of creation, and the door into the security of true heaven. Sometimes He magnifies the partially impossible that He may magnify the truly impossible. He said, when He saw a mother nursing her child once, Can a woman forget her sucking child? yea, it is partially impossible, but it may be the fact—yet will not I forget Thee. For a small moment have I forsaken Thee, but with everlasting mercies I have gathered Thee. He only speaks of the small moment that He may get your attention to the eternal duration. Thou dost, by thunderstorm or earthquake or great wind or still small voice or in a thousand other ways, strive to get our attention, that foolish man may begin, even late in life, to take his first lesson in the kingdom of God.

[*Sunday Morning, 14th January, 1900.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we want with our very heart's most burning desire to join the whole company of heaven in thinking about Thee and in praising Thy glorious name. We bless Thee for the invisible choir, we thank Thee for the fellow-worshippers whom we cannot see. Many of them know something of our own difficulty and pain, they know how impossible it is for the heart to empty itself in words; they have travelled this road, they know all the risings and fallings of the way, and they have had experience of the distress and perplexity of the flesh. We would now join hands with the great throng of the heavenly ones, and praise Thee in a common song. If we think of Thy mercy, we will call it tender mercy; if we recall Thy kindness, we will call it loving-kindness: Behold, Thou dost surpass Thyself in the revelation of Thy light and love to our wondering and worshipping hearts. If we look back, it is to see God; if we look forward, it is to see God; we live and move and have our being in God, and if we cannot conceive Thee or express Thee in words we are glad of our inability, showing us at once our littleness and Thy greatness. Thou didst make the great sea, and we made the little boat which it drowns: Behold, Thou didst light up the whole sky, and Thou hast left us to number the hosts of the heavens, and we fail in our counting; we are very small beside Thee. And yet how great is man! Is he not made in the image and likeness of God? Is he not oftentimes more than angel, and sometimes almost Thyself? This is the great mystery of our life; the mystery is not outside us, it is within us, yea, we ourselves down to the least child are the mystery of God, never to be known, never to be fathomed. If we bring Thee our little song of praise and love and thankfulness, Thou wilt not disdain the strain; it is all we can do at present, the winter is against us, and the rough wind, and the high hill, and all these fiends that torment our blood, so that we cannot get out the hymn we would sing if we could. But Thou knowest us all, Thou weighest the whole case, Thou knowest when the lapse began, and the name of the man who overthrew our career and dashed our hopes to pieces: he lived long ago, but his black blood is in our veins; and Thou knowest it altogether; Thou wilt not be unkind or unjust, Thou wilt remember the case, yea, mayhap so great is Thy love, Thou wilt wonder that we can sing at all. There are some before Thee whose life is one continued

shower of sunshine ; whatever they touch turns into gold and beauty and music. There are others to whom the brightness of life has gone out ; some of them mayhap never had much brightness ; they had a way of failing, disaster followed them step by step like an evil-bred hound. Thou knowest all the case, Thou canst make up a great deal : what wonder if Thou dost some day make it up all ?—yea, what wonder if some time the first shall be last, and the last shall be first, and God shall have His way ? We pray Thee to deliver us from small ideas, from ignorant prejudices, from false limitations of our own imposition, and lead us out into the liberty of Thy Son and of the magnificent prospect which He has created through the reconciliation which He has wrought. Do not let us be tempted again by our own littleness to be still more dwarfish ; give us the spirit of inspiration and high courage, which tells us that we can be more if we want to be, yea, immeasurably more if we make God our sufficiency. If we recall the Cross we know it is because we cannot live without it ; our life is in Christ. Christ has given us life and given it to us more abundantly, like wave after wave. So we are strong in Him, sometimes so strong that we must sing ; we should accuse ourselves if we held our breath. Wilt Thou come to us now and give each heart a blessing, the loneliest and the saddest, the little boy and the little girl, and those outcast orphan folk who beg to sit at the world's table, and eat some handful of crumbs and drink of the water which other people have left. Oh, 'tis a sad, sad world !—and yet sometimes so glad that it seems almost the best. Lord, lighten upon us with Thy smile and break in upon us with the great surprise of Thy love, and set us wondering how it is that our hearts are so full of the true life.

This prayer we leave at the Cross. . Nothing can die under the shadow of that tree but sin. God pity us, and take our sin away, and thus let the Cross be no longer a bare gallows, but a tree sprouting, budding, and blossoming, and growing fruit for the world's hunger. Amen.

CCI.

APPEARANCES.

"He hangeth the earth upon nothing."—JOB xxvi. 7.



LET us see how oftentimes appearances are false. A great many things seem to be . . . and are not. We think we see; we say, Seeing is believing: but it is not. What fools we are, and what numerous families we have! As if the eye could see anything. I saw it! is your simple and conscientious plea: but it is a fallacy, it is pious nonsense. Am I not to believe my own eyes? you inquire with a fine rural simplicity; and I answer almost gruffly, No; whatever you believe, do not believe your own eyes. It would be most profitable to go through large sections of the Bible and to gather instances illustrative and corroborative of this great truth. Sometimes language is employed, as it were, even in the Bible to mislead and to deceive. Sometimes the Bible says a thing in order to show us that it is not true. The Bible has many moods. I think, perhaps, a squared stone or a bared brick may not have many moods, but life has many changes; it is a rough irregular verb, and it must in many cases be left to conjugate itself. The Bible takes it for granted that most of its readers will surely have some sense. So there is a mocking tone in the Book, a satiric tone, a figurative genius. The Bible has a way of its own, and it is not the common way, and if we bring the common spirit and the common dictionary to its interpretation, then no hot-bed of heresy will yield so many vicious and poisonous fruits.

It does seem as though the Lord did hang the world or the earth upon nothing. But what if "nothing" be greater than something? It would be like the Bible thus to educate us. Once the Bible made a man say,

with a loud clanging voice, "He is a god" when he was nothing of the kind. But the Bible really must assume some common sense in its readers, the greatest of all assumptions in the history of the human mind. If people would bring common sense to bear upon the interpretation of Scripture we should have a great many more Bible believers, Bible readers, and Bible circulators. It never occurs to a great number of people that the Bible is to be interpreted even in some of its most difficult passages by inspired and sanctified common sense. We hear it said sometimes that this or that society is like a rope of sand. These are the mechanicians who talk so, the men who have patent stoves and patent machines, and things wherewith to tie up other things; a species of peculiar and indescribable and unimaginable ironmongery. Now the greatest things are all ropes of sand in the sense in which that foolish term is employed by foolish people. Why, all these stars and planets, call them what you may, are all ropes of sand; they have no telephones even connecting one with the other. The poet says, "Star unto star speaks light;" that is a poetical conception, and most admirable and appreciable: but in the ironmongery sense the whole creation is a rope of sand. There are societies that are so described; there are people who cannot understand a society unless it is bound together by strong cables, thick ropes, many chains—chains that will make a noise if you rattle them; then they think this is security. It is a poor notion; it is a very superficial conception of things. I can imagine a society bound together by sympathy, by a masonry of trust and love: I can imagine a society being all the stronger because it has no rules and regulations and schedules and fines, and a manifold and intricate apparatus for doing nothing. I can imagine love being a stronger chain than ever was made of iron; I can imagine a child being more faithful to its home than ever a prisoner was to his cell: the one, the prisoner, in his cell, is bound hand and foot, and the child has all the liberty of the fresh air and all the freedom of the green fields, but he comes back at night, back to his father, his mother, and to the fire which he dare stir. Gravitation is stronger than mechanics. In-

spiration is mightier than information. Information goes through many editions, revised and amended; inspiration is the continual sustenance of the soul by invisible power and energy. That is the rope of sand, vulgarly and falsely so called, to which we had all better trust. Of course we are not all in the same form at school; there is the boy of the sixth form who is upon almost familiar terms with the headmaster, and there is the little creature far down yonder that hardly dare say that he is in the school at all; we must not compare the boys, or judge the one by the other. And so it is in the spiritual life; some are further on than others. We must recognise the diversity if we cannot measure the distance.

Now take an instance or two in illustration of the fact that the Bible often says things which it means to be taken in the contrary way. "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness" (Matthew viii. 12). Is it possible that the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness? It is not. Then what are we to make of these words? Exactly what the Speaker intended us to make of them; He uses a figure of speech, He Himself is a living parable. That is what we forget; He did not make parables, He was Himself a Parable. What, then, if He always spake in parables? The apparent children of the kingdom, the persons who set up paper claims to be in the family; the persons who professed to be children, and so much professed it as to deny that any other were children except themselves. This was Christ's way of describing a life of hypocrisy and appearance only, a cloaked life, rottenness clad in purple, pestilence covered with a robe of silk; so-called, self-called children of the kingdom—oh, the mockery of that tone as He uttered the words!—shall be cast out into outer darkness. Let us beware of mere profession, let us set ourselves in holy guard against semblance and simulation and pretence of being children of the kingdom. The real children of the kingdom will prove their sonship by their actions: there will go with them an accompanying and interpreting atmosphere, and people will say, Who are these Christian

professors? They do not say much, but when they come in the room seems to be lighter, the very lamps start up into a new radiance, and all the children seem to welcome them, and the very dog, stretched on the hearth-rug before the warm fire, seems to feel that the friendliness of the situation has been almost visibly and measurably enhanced. Whereas the other children so-called and self-called seem to sound a trumpet before their coming, and to say, Behold, we are the children of the kingdom. And the Lord meets them face to face and there and then casts them out. He is a just Lord; hypocrisy cannot escape His penetration.

Take another instance given by the Apostle Paul himself—I Corinthians i. 21, 25—two instances almost in the same line—"the foolishness of preaching" and "the foolishness of God." Surely these terms are so startling as to be self-annotating. The meaning is so deeply concealed as to be to spiritual discernment patent and almost glaring. It does seem a pitiable thing to preach against a stone wall, but it is the preaching that will outlast the world. No matter can survive mind. The mind is ruler. When mind and matter come, so to say, into collision it is matter that must go down. That is proved by the whole history of civilisation. When civilisation began, so to say, it looked as if it were perfectly ridiculous that it could attack all that ignorance, darkness, profanity, all that material apparatus and scaffolding, all that mass of so-called matter; civilisation seemed to be ill-pitted against that Goliath. But it is Goliath with his spear, David with his prayer: tell me the conditions and I will forecast the issue. Preaching, properly interpreted, means mind, sympathy, humanity of soul, profound and vital communion with God; and when you find these elements and characteristics you find victory—certain, complete, irreversible victory. "The foolishness of God"; that is to say, man looking upon the apparatus, says, The whole thing is absolutely impossible; that you should simply send forth men without swords, without purses, almost without sandals to their feet, and hardly a staff to his hand has the apostle, and he is going forth to pull down the empires that are of granite and gold

and wrought iron. And he will do it. Things are not what they seem.

Take an instance as given in Matthew xiv. 9: "And the king was sorry." If you search into the grammar and the rhetoric of the passage you will find that the true paraphrase would be this: The king drew a long face, and seemed as if he were very much disappointed that the girl had chosen this kind of thing at her mother's bidding; he was exceedingly annoyed, surprised; in fact, judging by his face, he was almost heart-broken. It was all rhetoric. Rhetoric is about the biggest liar that ever spoke; it is almost impossible for the rhetorician to be an honest man; he must have his three members and his mechanical climax, whoever comes or whoever goes. This man was an actor; he never showed his face; he never showed more than a mask, and that mask did look so heart-broken and disappointed when the woman asked him to murder somebody. He was sorry apparently: it looked as if he were sorry. Exactly; he looked as if he were sorry. He was not sorry, he was anything but sorry.

Then, again, we read in Job xxvi. 11, "The pillars of heaven trembled." They did nothing of the sort; they looked as if they trembled. It was to indicate a great action on the other side of things; compared with the greater thunder, the immenser energy, it seemed as if the very pillars of heaven trembled, reeled, and would fall; the pillared firmament was rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble. Nothing of the kind. The geometry of the universe is perfectly safe. But it seemed as if it were so. Ay, that seeming will be the ruin of us all, if we do not take care. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death." All the appearances are in the man's favour; the road is broad and smooth and grassy, it is hedged on both sides, the wild flowers grow luxuriantly along the whole line of the road, and as for the hedges they are living cages filled with living songsters, and the whole blue sky seems to bend down in appreciation and approval. The man says he will go this way. Appearances are in his favour. The man has not seen the end of the road; the prophet was not

there to say, "The end thereof is death." Never take a way because it seems to be flowery and fair; never say, Well, this is evidently the pleasanter path, whatever there may be at the other end; it seems as if we should at all events enter upon a very tempting and satisfying path; now let us proceed. That is poor reasoning; it ends in nothing in many cases but disappointment. It will be found on examination, and on the retrospection of human life as a whole, that where the gate has been strait, there has been a kingdom at the other end of the path; where the way has been difficult, there has been rest at the end; where the climbing has been very steep and very hard, at the top of the mountain is such a vision of delight as never before burst upon the admiring gaze of the poet. That is so. You cannot upset history. You and I are only going to live some forty, fifty, or seventy years, and we know next to nothing about anything. We all need guidance, inspiration, prophetic suggestion; this we can find nowhere in such rich abundance and so evidently pertinent as in the Bible. The Bible is the book that compasses the whole human life and prepares equally for all its claims. The Bible is the only programme or book of guidance that is equally strong at every point. It is not a fair-weather book. It is not a book that you only need in the summer-time, and can put away in the library until the summer-time recurs. This is a book that lives usefully every day, and that we need every day, and that sometimes we need seven times a day. It is well to have such a teacher at hand. Sometimes the laugh of the fool will be the only festival you want, but his laugh has hardly died out of the insulted air until you are in pain and trouble and want, or the little child is sick, or your own grave is being secretly dug. You want a book that will touch the whole circuit and area of comic tragic human life.

Dozens of these verses could be cited, and if they were set in consolidated array, they would all speak with one voice, saying in effect, Beware of appearances; beware of simulations; beware even of language that seems to be perfectly plain and clear; do not deceive yourselves by probabilities and by phantasmagoria of divers colour and action; always

lay hold of the upper wisdom, and in the strength of that co-partnery read even the simplest document which a man sends to you; the signature may be right, but it may be subscribed to a document that is full of grammatical puzzle and contradiction; pray for the discerning mind, the penetrating soul, the all but infallible intuition and instinct.

“I saw no temple therein.” We have just lost one of the strongest intellects, one of the sublimest characters, that ever illumined and enriched the Church of God. I met Dr. Martineau once, and he asked me a question bearing upon this very point. You know how keen and how subtle his mind was, and how wondrously generous and tender was his moral nature. He and I looked at things from the opposite points of the universe; we had absolutely nothing in common in a doctrinal or theological sense. We all revered the scholar, the man, the philosopher, the deep thinker, and the prose poet. He is a great loss. Said he to me, “Why do you call your Church by the heathenish word Temple?” He was old enough to be my father, and I had actually committed the transgression which he indicated in this manner, and I should have been glad of a little time to consider my position and to whet my reply. It is not a heathenish title; that is to say, though it may have been employed by the heathen, in many instances it is also a Jewish word. Temple is a Bible term, temple is a word which Jesus Christ employed and, so to say, endorsed; and the Apostle Paul used the word temple in a living sense. And yet John says in his Apocalypse, “I saw no temple therein.” What did he mean? Is not this an instance in which the texts already quoted are illustrated? Certainly. He saw no temple therein, because there was nothing but temple; it was all temple. John saw no sun in heaven. Why did he see no sun there? Because there was nothing but light. The sun, as a local institution, was perfectly useless, it could not meet the situation at all. The Lord God and the Lamb are the light thereof. When life turns to light what need of lamp or candle or withering sun?

[*Thursday Morning, 18th January, 1900.*]

Prayer.

THE eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth; all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do: enable us to live, we humbly pray Thee in the name of Jesus, holy Father, under this supreme and unchangeable conviction; then our life shall be full of light, and the light shall be music, and the music without words; then shall we have great gladness, and all things shall beam with Thy presence and glow with Thy love. We forget Thee; we say, Doth the Lord see? is the Lord nigh at hand, or afar off? can the Lord see in the darkness and in the great cloud? Thus do we talk folly to ourselves, and put Thee far away when Thou oughtest by consent of our love to be near at hand, a very present help in trouble. The darkness and the light are both alike unto Thee; Thou dost beset us behind and before, and lay Thine hand upon us; Thy love considers, and Thy pity bedews us as with tears. What shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards us? We humbly pray Thee in the name of Jesus to work in us the deep conviction that Thou art a God nigh at hand and not afar off, yea that Thou art both far off and nigh at hand, commanding all space, holding all time in contempt because of its meanness, sitting upon the circle of things, ruling in eternity, ordering all things by a decree which we cannot comprehend. Oh that we might rest in the Lord, in the very sanctuary and church of His heart, that we might serve His altar with love and obedience and expectancy! Thou knowest how few are our days, a handful at the most; they vanish whilst we speak about them; behold, we die by living. Oh that men were wise, that they would think of these things, that they would consider their latter end, and read the morning by the starlight, and see what Thy meaning is in all the way. Deliver us out of great and sore trouble, deliver us out of the pit in which we fear we would be lost; sanctify our misery, and thereby make us stronger, tenderer men. The Lord help us to enjoy the passing sunshine, whether of love or memory or happy, holy service.

We ask all at the Cross. We would live on Calvary; we would be always at the Cross, except when we are at the Tomb—vacant and glorified. Amen.

CCII.

IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

"In the sight of God."—I PETER iii. 4.



DO not know why I preach upon this text, but I can only get rid of it by preaching. It has haunted me and sung to me; it has solemnised and inspired me all the days of our separation. "In the sight of God" is an expression which occurs—who can tell me how often? Surely there must be some souls here that care for the Bible, and pick up the crumbs and reckon the moments. "In the sight of God" is an expression which occurs many times in the Old Testament and sometimes in the New Testament, and it is one of those expressions that find their way into the very jewellery of our thought and write themselves as if in diamond letters upon all the adornment of the heart. What does "sight" mean? The word sight has various meanings: sometimes it refers to the eyes of the body, sometimes to the vision of the heart, sometimes to the exercise of talent and judgment. Sometimes the word sight simply means estimation, as if we should say, In the estimation of God; whatever it may be in human estimation, it is good, bad, or indifferent in the estimation of God. Even there the expression is optical. God sees; the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself mighty on behalf of them that trust in Him. His eyes are weapons, His eyes are lightnings, His smile makes the morning, His frown makes the night; He is a great God above all gods; He stands where other gods cannot climb.

Peter says in this text, Let it be in the hidden man of the heart; let it be in the meek and quiet spirit; let it be in one sense invisible that it may in another sense be more visible; let your good works have a good background. Spirit sees spirit.

Spirit cannot communicate with flesh; they have no dealings one with the other in the deepest spiritual sense. The flesh must be got at in a roundabout manner, as with anvils and hammers and axes and rough rude instruments of all kinds; for itself is rough and rude manifold,—a gathering mystery, a riddle which cannot suggest its own answer. We have dealt variously with man—poor man! We have made a livelihood out of him; we have used long words in discoursing upon the man mystery. We began with gravitation, and advanced to cohesion, and thence to chemical affinity, and thence to animal life, and thence to man. We like to build these little triangles, and illustrate man on a blackboard; there is something singularly satisfactory in tracing man in any direction except the right one. Gravitation makes a poor beginning for this seeing creature. Who made gravitation? who discovered it? who gave it a name? who sold it to some syndicate that they might make of it ever-changing schemes of physiology and philosophy? These are deep questions and they touch sensitive parts of the soul in a way apt to provoke resentment. You and I as Christian students believe that God made man in His own image and likeness, and gave him hearing and sight: the two things that stand nearest to spirit, and are almost spiritual. Spirit alone can communicate with spirit: God is a Spirit; therefore God communicates with the spirit of man, which is akin to His own. How He does this He has never condescended to explain; but that communication is made to us from the spiritual world is certain; otherwise many ideas, suggestions, impulses, and mental operations can never be accounted for. There are many passages in the Old Testament which we cannot understand until we have read the New Testament, and brought the new lamp to shed a light on the old mystery. And so there are many things about this human sight, and the divine sight looking at it, spirit of man looking for Spirit of God, and Spirit of God trying what image it can create whereby to represent itself, and lighting upon the gentle-breasted dove. A wondrous thing that God should have had to look about, so to say, amongst His own creatures to pick up one here and one there which will most nearly represent some divine idea.

And so, who is this fair, young, beautiful creature, His face a mystery? who is He? Represent him to me by some other life. The voice says, Behold the Lamb. Lamb and dove; they seem to bring their own meaning with them; there is not in them one drop of bad black blood, all so gentle as to be all but spiritual, and so symbolical that it must be behind each of them a sacrament.

God is continually rebuking both our hearing and our seeing; He says to us in effect, You have sight, but must not stretch it beyond its proper limits; and you can hear noise, you cannot yet hear music, but hearing the noise is a preparation for hearing the music; you think you can hear the music now, but you hear no music; the true music is to come; it is a thought rather than a thing, a film rather than a substance; but in so far as you use your faculties within due limits and in a reverential spirit you are advancing—Oh, hear it and be glad!—advancing to the time of song, and music, and rapture, and ecstasy. God rebukes us sometimes by the lower animals, as we saw in a late discourse. Man has partitioned out the animal creation so as to find in it a great many “inferior” animals. Did we not inquire here but a few days ago wherein the inferiority consists or expresses itself? There are not so many inferior animals; each animal has a medal and a certificate of his own greater than any I have. It pleases me, because I have a dictionary, to call certain animals inferior. Things come easier to me after I have uttered that slander. The inferior animal can often see where we cannot see. Inferior animals can hear when we cannot hear. The dog upon the warm hearthrug starts up, when the master wonders as to the reason why: but he calls the dog an inferior animal. Even things without life are sometimes superior to us in certain particulars and directions. God thus rebukes, chastises, and limits men; sets up new frontiers, says, Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further; tells Ambition to sit down. Can you see anything in this diamond? You declare that it is a diamond of the first water; it pleases you to talk so much of foreign tongues. If ignorance were to lose fluency, what would there be left? Take this lens, a thing without life, and look at

the diamond. Why do you start? Why, there is a black thing in the very middle of it. Who told you so? The lens. But is not the human eye better than any little piece of glass which the lapidary can prepare for you? Are you not a man and can you not see without the aid of a little piece of glass? The microscope says, No; the telescope says, No; and even some poor little piece of glass that you can frame and put in your eye and look at some object through it quite closely, says, No, without me you could not see that black spot in the gem of the first water. Besides, what does a man like you want with a telephone? You are a man: why do you not despise the telephone and speak across a continent naturally, just as you would speak to a man over a garden wall? You cannot; you are rebuked by inferior animals and by things without life. And, O man! you are shut up and shut back; you ought to pray; so caged a thing as you should sometimes pray!

Thus we have a number of definitions and applications of the word, seeing or sight. We have been referring now to what may be called the mechanical department of sight, to common optics; but there is another vision,—a spirit which sees spirit, a spirit which sees spirit in a way for which there is no accounting with mere words, for words themselves are bodies. We should speak more if we spoke less; we should get nearer the soul if we did not tarry in the body of the letter. We think that words have some right to be here and there, but in reality if our soul were right in the sight of God we should do without all these little verbal, expensive vehicles, soul would touch soul, a look would be a volume, a sigh would be a psalter. Oh! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider that words are hindrances quite as much as helps, and that if we could do without words we should escape the tribulations and the anger of controversy. We are living continually under divine criticism, and we do not know it; hence we play the fool and waste the time, and encourage the spirit of falsehood to tell us more and more of his dreary tale. And the Lord looks upon the spirit; that is to say, upon the motive,

the disposition, the temper, the inward state and condition of things. To put it in Bible words, the Lord looketh on the heart. In the Bible the word heart is a large word; it is not the muscle which we call by that sweet name heart, the wondrous throbbing muscle that is always puzzling the poor doctors. There is not a more harassed race of men than the doctors; their troubles are ten thousand times more than the troubles of the so-called theologians. One of the greatest doctors says that the organ which the profession knows least about is the heart. The heart has cunning ways of its own in more senses than one: the heart accustoms itself to new conditions, makes a sphere for itself, has many eccentric and almost arbitrary movements and redistributions of its vital force. In the Bible no reference is made to that versatile and essential muscle; the word heart in the Bible often means the whole man, the imagination, the seat of the affections, the will, the spring of motive. The word heart gets a long way back into human experience, and it is said in another verse that the Lord "trieth" the heart, puts it to the test, sets it little puzzles, subjects it to small sacrifices, proves it, tries it, startles it, until the heart reveals itself to itself by the wisdom and the grace of God, and until the heart becomes its own great mystery. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." A wondrous multifold organ! "Son, give me thine heart." The Lord does not look upon the outward appearance. What is stature to Him who built the heavens? what is appearance to Him who made the flowers and the morning star? The Lord looketh upon the soul, the spirit, the heart, the motive, the temper, what we would do if we could. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he"—nor more nor less.

In Peter's expression we find the element of valuation—the valuation, it may be, of property. There are two valuations, the valuation which man assigns, and the valuation which God fixes. Peter says that a meek and a quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price. In the sight of man it is ridiculed. Who cares for meekness? who appreciates quietness? who is there that does not regard repose as a sign of

feebleness? whereas repose may be the last expression of power, quietness may be reserved thunder. Moses was meek, the meekest man in all the earth, but who could be so angry when his spirit was turned? The lamb is peaceful, docile, yet one great poet speaks of "the wrath of the Lamb." "In the sight of God of great price." Then a man may be rich without knowing it; he may have qualities and attributes of character which are jewellery without price, far surpassing rubies, and diamonds, and all the things thou canst desire out of the silver mine and the gold mine. A man may be rich, and have no jewel casket; and man may be very rich, and never have been in a jeweller's shop? a woman may be most rich, the wealthiest, sweetest mother, without having any things that are called lovely, and beautiful, and precious. And so a man may be a poor man and not know it. What have you? All these diamonds. What are they worth each? Ten thousand pounds. What more have you? Pearls and rubies and all the precious stones named in the Apocalypse in cabinet after cabinet. Am I not rich? Not necessarily so; you may be so, there is no harm in having diamonds; I am prepared at any moment to receive a dozen more of them than I have; there is not the slightest harm in you having pearls and rubies, they are the creation of God, and they are oftentimes, if looked at wisely, the very mirror of the heavens; they read me fables and stories and poems and dreams about light and colour and mystery, stretching back into spaces eternal. Yet I may have all these, and be utterly poor, bankrupt in soul. Blessed is he who has the true riches, and if to the true riches he adds perishable wealth, and uses that perishable wealth as a wise steward, I thank God for him; he is a trustee of society, he is a help of the world, he is eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, and the loneliness of orphanhood he banishes by the tender music of sympathy. A man may be either rich or poor, and not know it. Some are rich in faith; some are rich in gold; some are rich in both. May I have dreams of heaven? may I have so much faith that I can almost see and feel and touch those that are on the other side of the crystal line? Yes. Then how rich I may

be! May I come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn whose names are in heaven, and unto the spirits of just men made perfect? and may I have sweet, deep, prolonged communion with those who have taken upon themselves by the grace of God the white robe? Yes! Then I can be no longer poor.

There is another sense in which this word "In the sight of God" is used—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." That is the law which settles everything. There are so many people who think themselves law-abiding who are law-breaking, but they do not know it, and they do not mean it; gentle, modest people, but not deficient in pharisaic zeal. I want to obey the great law which includes and transfigures all the little laws in the degree in which they are true and wise. So many people think they are law-abiding, and they are absolutely nothing of the kind; they are keepers of the little law. If the law were a small geometrical figure which you might represent as a parallelogram, if you gave those people a little ivory button they could hit the finger of every intruder, and keep the little parallelogram inviolate. But the universe is not a parallelogram; the great spiritual meaning and purpose of the universe is not geometric. We make squares and triangles, and get a livelihood out of them: God makes the circles, and sits upon the circle that includes all the little circles, and keeps the universe on its right course according to His own mind and decree. There are so many little mischief-mongers who keep a byelaw, and think they are keeping God's law; God writes no byelaws: God is love. I daresay if some men were to enter this little pulpit and preach in it a more or less little sermon that they would be considered by some persons as breaking the law. Which law? whose law? Who has any right to make laws on such a subject? Who breaks the law? The man who makes it.

Sometimes the Apostle Paul shows the magnificence of his intellectual and spiritual power by uniting the two sides—human and divine. He commands us to make a living, an honest living, openly and above board;

he says, None of your little corner-tricks, none of your secret commissions, none of your civic syndicates, none of your taking something with one hand and something else with the other hand and saying nothing about it. Why, the Apostle Paul would burn the City of London to ashes! Saith the Apostle, Make an honest living, and let us see how you do it: "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians viii. 21). He has such a religion as that! What wonder that it does not pay? Now if we want to have a religion that would enable us just to make tricks of trade—do you see?—one might adopt a religion of that sort; there is a comfortable-ness about india-rubber that there is not about cast iron. But the Apostle Paul, speaking in the name and by the authority of Christ, will not have anything of the kind; he says, If you will not work, you ought not to eat, and you must not get your bread in some secret, underhand way, and you must not be keeping secrets from somebody else, and saying, Now we must get this thing done here when the other man is not looking. If we could have a religion of that kind, permitting us to go behind the curtain, steal behind the arras, and do several things, we might perhaps adopt that religion: it is not costly, it is not expensive, it is convenient, and it may sometimes be profitable. But, my dear fellow-men, religion, as Christ interprets the word, is not a trick, is not a method of "getting on" by false means. It is a method of doing without bread when we cannot earn it honestly. What wonder that we build churches, and break the spirit they are intended to symbolise?

Oh, hear the word of the Lord!

[*Sunday Morning, 4th March, 1900.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have heard that all have sinned and come short of Thy glory, and we cannot make ourselves exceptions to this inclusive law. There is none righteous, no, not one; all we like sleep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way; if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. When we think of this we are overwhelmed with fear, yea, with dismay; but another voice thrills our hearts with the Gospel music: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is the miracle of Christ Jesus our Lord, in Whose Name we approach Thee, without Whose Name there is no availing prayer. God be praised for all His tender mercy and loving-kindness; it has been seen in the night-time as well as in the morning light; there are those who have companied with Thee in the great darkness, and those with whom Thou hast walked through the wilderness; they will not consent that their experience should be lost; through the power and grace of that experience they glorify Thy holy Name; they say, We have heard and felt and tasted and seen and handled of the word of life. So wonderful is the miracle of experience, the accumulating corroboration of personal testimony to the grace and wisdom and strength of Almighty God. We have heard of the better life, we have been told of the higher places where there is no night; when men have returned from their heavenly dream they have said of the city of God, No shadows yonder. We have been delighted with great joy to hear of the cloudless morning, we have said on many a mountain-top, Lord, it is good to be here, we would build tabernacles and temples and abide in this place evermore. For all these mountain-top experiences we bless Thee, for all these ennobling ecstasies we thank Thee, Lord; they help us to live, they are nerve and tonic and strength to us in the valley of the toiling week. May the Lord's Day be as a mountain-top high up in the air, the clouds quite below it; may we be refreshed by the presence and the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord, and thus be strengthened to go forward, whether it be to fight a fight or to suffer some sore distress. We bless Thee for aught we have seen of misery, affliction, and great sorrow, in the degree in which such sight has been sanctified; and if any unsanctified

visions remain may they be quite cleansed away that we may get the full advantage of the sky. Oh, those lingering doubts, fears, memories of cruel distress! the day has yet hardly strength of sunshine enough to kill such clouds; so they haunt the soul and sometimes they embitter the memory, and now and then they hinder prayer. God be merciful to us and drive these lingering shadows right off the field of the heavens, so that nothing shall remain but the sunshine of Thy pleasure, the benediction of Thine own acceptance. We thank Thee for all words of sweet music about the possibilities of life; we have been told that affliction may be sanctified, that loss may become gain, and that all the dross may be taken away and nothing may remain but the pure gold as it were seven times refined. We are told that Thou art making man in Thine own image and likeness; the slow centuries hardly discover one advance in the great process and the slow thousands of centuries have not yet made a man. But the Lord worketh hitherto, and Christ worketh, and the Holy Spirit worketh, and through this threefold and infinite energy there shall at last stand up a perfect man. The Lord help us to bear our part in the great advance of life through struggle; may none be faint-hearted and loose in the knee-joints; may every muscle be strengthened, and the whole life fired with a consuming yet indestructible passion. Some are here who have brought broken hearts to be healed; some are here who have lost the most loved of all. Some are in great fear and distress because they know without knowing that the condemnation of death is written upon the choicest of the family flock; yet they look benign and speak cheerfully and tell all the subtle falsehoods of love. God pity them! why were they made, and made to suffer such cruelty? Is not this power of suffering part of Thine own nature and part of Thine own image? Didst Thou not die that the sinner might live? Oh, the mystery of grace, the hidden mystery of the Cross! May we live in it and love in it and stand fast in it evermore. Amen.

THE SUPREME SAYINGS OF PETER.



MOST exquisite booklet might be made out of the supreme sayings of the Apostles. All their sayings were more or less beautiful, but there are supreme sayings that might be collated and that might be illuminated in fitting and expressive colour and symbol. Who was the greatest talker amongst the Apostles? Account for it as we may, the Apostle Peter seems to me to have been the most eloquent and expressive member of the original band of our Lord's disciples. There is something about the primacy of Peter; the case is not to be dismissed with a sneer, or with any expression of unconcern or Protestant indifference. Too much may have been made of that supposed primacy, but it is quite likely that too little may have been made of it. Perhaps it is always true that the reality is in the middle course or in the middle definition; certain it is that the Apostle Peter was the spokesman of the little band, and I cannot think that all his brilliant sayings were utterances of his own intellectual vivacity or poetic fervour. Jesus Christ himself did not attribute the great sayings of Peter to Peter's own fertility of genius. It would seem as if the Saviour Himself was simply surprised at the speeches of this senior disciple of His; more than once He stopped to speak about Peter's marvellous utterances. As truly as Peter saw Christ's transfiguration so truly did Christ see Peter's transfiguration. At some supreme moment he dropped the sea, the ship, the fisherman's garb and gait, and went out into another personality. His was a life of rough changes; sometimes he created a kind of Sabbath Day in the middle of the week, so that men forgot their dates and their poor mean calendars, being lost in a holy peace, uplifted in a divine ecstasy, thrilled with an energy which made resurrection not only possible but

a commonplace. We cannot always be in such high moods; even when we are lifted up into the third heaven we must come down again to tell that we cannot tell what we have seen.

Would it not be interesting to gather together into one illuminated booklet the supreme sayings of the disciples and Apostles of Jesus Christ? Surely we might begin with the Apostle Peter. He had an energy of his own; you might not like it, or you might like it, but there is nothing like it; there is a uniqueness that is a kind of creation. The Apostle Peter represented that uniqueness in a vivid and startling manner. Sometimes he would stand beside Isaiah and speak as eloquently; sometimes he would burn like Ezekiel; and so hot was his imagination that it became hardly more than a commonplace for him to imagine that all these things, these starry palaces and out-of-the-way glories, should be burned and fall in a shower of white ashes. This is what the Christian thought does for a man; it elevates him mentally, it kindles his imagination, it not only subdues his will, it energises that will and makes it gigantic and prevalent in all the contests to which God has called it.

Can we gather some of those sayings of the great Peter?—and shall we reason from the gathered sayings that it is in no common seat that we must place this man? Nay, he does not ask a seat, he takes a throne, and does it by right, by natural evident right, a right which the heart acknowledges and which the intellect in its most judicial mood approves. For Christianity is the true reason. Those who think that they have the true reason without true Christianity are refrigerators who are reserving ice under, if we may personate the case, the idea that they are nursing the stuff suns and stars are made of. These are some of the delusions to which poor orphaned reason is delivered until it regain its liberty and majesty by faith. What is faith? What is wit? What is love? What is life? Where is the life? No man has seen it. Do not imagine therefore that, What is faith? is a mocking question which has no relation to any other energy or expression of

manhood. What is faith? is one of the questions that can never be answered.

Let us hear Peter, without venturing to put his sayings into historic or chronological sequence; we may indeed open the New Testament almost at a venture, and we shall light upon some flashing sentence of the senior disciple. Take the highest of all, though not the first of all, in the order of time:—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That is the tone that is in the trumpet that will at last awaken the dead. The resurrection is in the tone; no creation can remain concealed when the blast of that voice sounds over the dear resting-place of the holy dead. This is an instance in which, as has been said, Jesus Christ Himself was in a sense surprised. If one or two of the other disciples had said this it would seem as if they had some right of gentleness and wisdom to speak such revelation. Yet it was Peter, the bold, the reckless, the self-disregarding Peter, who spoke the supreme word in the New Testament. Then said Jesus, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven": I called thee first, He called thee first. Great is the man who speaks revelations; blessed is the prophet who in the early dawn sees the far-away hills of gold on the horizon, then sees the nearer hills of actual life in its best expression, in its solidified poesy and music. It so happens that, explain it as you can, one man does see things before another man. This cannot be accounted for by mere accident: we are not at liberty to say that it might have been otherwise; if we were permitted such wild exposition of what we know of the universe, see to what blundering conclusions and awful chaos we would bring everything:—It might have been otherwise, it might have been some other man who would have said this; if Peter had not said this, perhaps another mind would have discovered it in due time. Why fritter away the great occasion by such poor conjectures and foolish surmises that have not about them even the delight of a dream, when we have a Book which we have proved to be true which tells us that God elects, fore-ordains, creates, places, distri-

butes, with a will which is inscrutable? The man who said this concerning Christ can never take a second place in the Church; he may retire upon that revelation. There are some words that are immortal, and there are some degrees of fame that are lessened by being added to in a certain nominal sense. When you have spoken the supreme word, vanish; the next word you say may level you with the dust. Oh, to die in ecstasy, to vanish when God has permitted us to speak the supremely golden word in all our earthly speech! Peter fell from this great eminence in almost his very next sentence, but let it be said of him for ever, he said, first of all, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Well for him, in some senses, if his fierce yet gentle lips had closed at that moment, and never opened again!

Peter was a poet, though he wrote no verse; he was full of poetic instinct and sensitiveness; he knew things without passing through the schools. It is not necessary for every man to go to the school or to the university, though it is necessary for most men to do so. There are men like the disciples and Apostles of our Lord's early ministry who came to things directly; they went to no digged well for their water, they drank the morning dew. What instance have we of the poetic instinct and mood of so grim a fisherman as Simon Peter? The answer is at hand. Once, without anybody speaking to him so far as we can discover by the record, he felt a new balminess in the air, he felt the breath of spring on the mountain-top; the north-east wind was gone and a gentle zephrous breeze played around the high hill-top, and he said, Master, it is good to be here. Every man surely knows the spring's first kiss; surely there cannot be a living man who does not know the difference between the blossom of ice which we call snow and the warmer blossom of spring which we call a flower. Without anyone mentioning a word to Peter as to anything having occurred to interfere with the breezes of Tabor he said, Master, the angels must have kissed the air, this whole air is full of the balm and fragrance of a better world; Master, let us build, let us remain, let us call it home. Peter was responsive to environ-

ment. He wrote a Paradise Regained when he uttered that one sentence, though he hardly knew what he was saying at the time. It is not necessary for us to understand what we are saying or what we are hearing in all cases; sometimes that blessing comes through the impression, not through the verbal utterance; many a time we could not recall a sentence of what we heard, and yet we know that we had been where the Lord was. "Lo, it is good to be here." Peter caught the spirit of the occasion; Peter was seized by the *genius loci*. So ought we to be in all our earthly experiences; there have been conversations which we could have wished to be prolonged through the night that the morning might have heard part of the music, and thus opened the day with a poem. Sometimes there have been calamities that have been turned into our only joy; there are losses that we would not part with for the world; in their presence all gold and silver fade away into nothingness, and the man retires having all the wealth he needs in his broken heart. It is thus God works, yea, it is thus God institutes His holy sacrament of bread, like flesh; or wine, like the blood of the heart; and thus He turns our darkest night into the starting point of our brightest morning.

Will you hear another word from the senior disciple? There is an aching weariness in his tone; he has lost his trumpet, he speaks in a great wordless sigh; he says, "Lord, Thou knowest all things." These are the tributes we value; tributes from the men who companied with Christ day by day and night by night; tributes from the men who knew Him most and knew Him best. Said Peter, "Lord, Thou knowest all things." Peter never said that to any other man; no other man could have received such a tribute; he must of necessity by the very demands of his sanity and his responsibility have repelled the suggestion that He knew all things. Jesus Christ never declined such homage. Such an instance, combined with innumerable others of the same quality, establish in my confidence, in my love, my Lord's awful gentle deity.

Once the big boy-man came to Christ in quite a

hilarious mood, as if he had discovered something; I like the boy element in this great rough Peter. He himself had by some means or other come to a grand conclusion; he thought he would surprise Christ himself by an unheard-of magnanimity. Lord, said he, how often shall I forgive my brother? - and not waiting for an answer Peter said, "Until seven times?" We should have seen his face when he said that word seven; it shone, it was alive with wondrous satisfaction; here is the greatest stride that ever has been taken in the moral history of mankind; a man proposes as a possibility at least that he may forgive his brother seven times. Hear that! What dost thou say, Peter? How often? Seven times. It was a grand assumption on the part of the poor fisherman. We are not to look at this assumption in the light of after events; we are not to allow our familiarity with the letter of Scripture to destroy the benediction of its spirit. Jesus said unto him, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven" —the arithmetic that cannot be numbered, the arithmetic that runs itself up into spiritual poetry. Now, who was the Lord and who was the disciple? When they come together face to face in this way you see just what Jesus Christ is. If we saw Peter only, and heard from Peter that it was possible to forgive a brother seven times, we should have said, How very gracious that poor fisherman is; he is prepared to receive seven insults and to forgive the whole seven; he is a wonderful man, he is indeed incarnate magnanimity. Some of us can hardly forgive once, twice would utterly exhaust us, but Peter says, I can forgive an offending brother seven times, and he hugged the seven to his heart like a bit of heaven. Now who can transcend that? Jesus Christ can, He says, let me requote the words: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." Go on forgiving. It is Christianity; that is an argument you cannot sneer out of existence. You may convince a man by enduring in a noble spirit even the afflictions which he inflicts upon you; you can overcome him by endurance; where logic fails patience may succeed. Christianity is not only an intellectual argument, it is a great moral plea, a magnificent, a most splendid moral endurance, forbearance, forgiveness, and illustra-

tion in blood. You win always by blood. As Christ did, so must we; not by some little cold iron argument which we keep in the mere intellect, but by the shedding of blood, by the persistent, uncomplaining, forgiving patience wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

Who can forget one of Peter's supreme statements when he was in supreme difficulty—who can forget his prayer? It may be reduced to three words. He was on the sea, the sea gave way, the floor of his unstable sanctuary trembled under him, and he said, "Lord, save me": a picture that should be printed on every brain, hung up in the gallery of every imagination, and made sacred by every heart tempest-tossed and sorely driven of the wind. "Lord, save me!" I cried unto the Lord from the deeps, and He heard me. We must make praying-places, we must build sanctuaries without a moment's notice; some extemporised utterances are everlasting testimonies and revelations. We speak best when our grief is hottest. He who said "Lord, save me" said, "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." He who said "Thou knowest all things" said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Not on the fickle waters, but on the standing hills, did Peter say, as with a cry of joy, "Lord, it is good to be here."

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

“Opposition has hurt many, popularity has wounded more. To say the truth, I am in some pain for you. Your natural abilities are considerable; you have been diligent in your studies; your zeal is warm, and your spirit is lively. With these advantages, I expect to see you a popular preacher. The more you are so the greater will your field of usefulness be: but, alas! you cannot yet know to what it will expose you. It is like walking upon ice. When you shall see an attentive congregation hanging upon your words; when you shall hear the well-meant, but often injudicious, commendations of those to whom the Lord shall make you useful; when you shall find, upon an intimation of your preaching in a strange place, people thronging from all parts to hear you—how will your hearts feel? It is easy for me to advise you to be humble, and for you to acknowledge the propriety of the advice; but while human nature remains in its present state, there will be almost the same connection between popularity and pride as between fire and gunpowder; they cannot meet without an explosion, at least, not unless the gunpowder is kept very damp. So, unless the Lord is constantly moistening our hearts (if I may so speak) by the influences of His Spirit, popularity will soon set us in a blaze. You will hardly find a person, who has been exposed to this fiery trial, without suffering loss.”—*Newton*, 1725-1807.

“It fares with ministers as with fish, none so welcome as the new come.”—*Adams*, 1654.

Husbandmen, when they are disappointed of their expected harvest, have not any to recompense their loss, but all is gone, both seed and labour; but notwithstanding the labour of the minister doth not profit with men, in respect of their incredulity, yet hath he his reward in heaven.—*Cawdray*, 1609.

May be you who find a people rude and sottishly ignorant, like stones in the quarry, and trees unfell'd, shall not bring the work to such perfection in your days as you desire; yet as David did for Solomon, thou maist by thy pains in teaching and instructing them prepare materials for another who shall rear the temple. It is very ordinary for one minister to enter into the labours of another, to reap those by a work of conversion, in whom a former minister hath cast the seed of knowledge and conviction: And when God comes to reckon with His workmen, the plough-man and sower shall have his penny, as well as the harvest-man and reaper.—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

[*Thursday Morning, 8th March, 1900.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, help us to rejoice even in desert places. It is easy to sing in the summer-light and amid all the richness of the summer fruits, but to sing in the cemetery, at the grave, amid the rocks, in grottoes and dens and caves—who can sing there? This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. May we be enabled to do as the prophet did, assure ourselves that we shall triumph over all desolating circumstances and sing with an open grave at our feet and a sunless sky overhead. Surely this would be a triumph of Thine; it would be no victory of our own, by our own energy and strength; it would be the very triumph of faith over all things darksome and terrible. Yet some people have to live in desolate places, amid bare rocks, where there is not a handful of pasture; and some are driven out upon stormy wild seas, where there seems to be nothing but death. Thou hast placed many lives in perilous places, and yet Thou hast called upon such lives to render Thee praise and honour even in the night of desolation and the cave of solitude. We can only do these things through Jesus Christ our Lord; He overcame the world, the flesh, and the devil, He is our Saviour and captain and leader: may we keep company with Him, then we shall know how to answer the devil in the wilderness and how to call poor lost dead lives from the grave, the tomb, though it be a cave and a stone be laid upon it. Amen.

CCIV.

MEMORABLE PLACES.

I.—CAVES.

"It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it."—JOHN xi. 38.



WONDER if this is the only cave mentioned in the Scriptures. I wonder if a short history of Biblical caves could not be drawn up by some deft hand. Everything else has been made more or less monumental and symbolic: what about the caves, the grottoes, the sullen places of the earth?—sullen because sunless. There are no windows in caves; the cave does not care for the morning nor for the evening star; it is a hidden place, more or less noisome perhaps, a place for the dead rather than for the living. Who made those caves?—the Mammoth Caves of Kentucky, the caves in all lands; places representative of darkness and cruelty and hidden crime of every sort. Will no poet arise to sing the cave? The Bible is full of caves, and we have taken too little notice of them either in our imagery or in our doctrine. The caves are a rich field for preachers if preachers were awake; the caves are a species of moral harvestfield and fine sentiment with many a seam of true poetry running through their darksome folds. Who need go out of the Bible for literary fancy or history, poetry, doctrine, teaching, comfort, or for anything the human heart and the whole area of human life stand in need of? Let us look at two or three caves, and if we can find out by any legitimate process that caves may be made symbolical, beautiful, and historically rich, what can God make of mountains and rivers and open spaces where the lilies grow? If God can work His miracles of experience and revelation in caves, what will He do in the open green field where the birds are and the flowers and the roots of endless summer?

Let us read Genesis xxiii. 19: "And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave . . . And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for . . . a burying-place." Are more people going to die? Why not let the era of death close with the wife of Abraham? The cave now is turned into a casket, and in that casket is a stone most precious; the cave is no longer a cave, it is in very deed a jewel-case, a casket, a place wherein is hidden a life that loves and a life that seemed to begin another life thousands and millions thick in its numbers, too big for any cage, yet that cage should be the beginning of nations. In a sense we may all be land-holders. No foot of land do I possess, nor want to possess, except in one melancholy instance. How little land we want at the last! Yet we are always grabbing land, greedy mucksters, always revelling and wallowing in mud. This is a cave where a mother lies, it was bought with gold from the sons of Heth; but there lay in it that which was more than gold. They are poor who have no grave; there is nothing to go to, there seems so little to think about, there wants that peculiar possession which unites and sanctifies all other possessions. The grave to the Christian is a key; he never goes to the grave without taking the key with him. I have the keys of the invisible, the grave and the dead; I am the Resurrection and the Life.

We shall hear more about this cave if we turn to Genesis xlix. 29. Old Israel charged his boys, as we should call them, and said unto them, "I am to be gathered unto my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite." This is the definition clause of the will, and all definition clauses in deeds and wills and legal documents of all sorts should be very explicit; so the dying old man continues: I mean "the cave that is in the field of Machpelah"—you remember Machpelah—"which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan"—the cave "which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place." There is law, before your legal instruments were thought of. You owe everything to Moses, but you are too mean in soul to confess it. You are willing to go back to

certain Roman bandits, and to say that law is built largely upon Roman conceptions. And where did Roman conceptions come from? Largely from the Pentateuch. Moses is the father of all lawyers; he builds on the rock, he shows examples that cannot fade with yellowing time. And there they buried Abraham, quoth Israel, and they buried Sarah his wife; in the same cave I buried Isaac and Rebekah; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth. Caves are beginning to be historical, yet poetical; we shall find flowers in caves; we shall make the sun envious; he—great shining king—thinks he makes all the flowers; for weeks and weeks he has now been absenting himself as much as he decently could, and we have been complaining of sunlessness and sympathising with poor struggling, rebuked, snubbed buds that cannot come out on their usual spring frolic. We shall find flowers in the caves and in the dens and grottoes of the earth, and say to the majestic light, Behold, these thou didst not grow, thou pale splendour of the day. We should have more flowers if we knew how to plant the roots or sow the seeds. There was one man in ancient history who was absolutely, at least in his own enthusiastic conception of things, independent of fogs and herds and flocks and fields of wheat and olives; he said nothing should choke or stifle his song; he would sing if he had to sing in solitude and cry hallelujah if only the rocks were listeners. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; then we shall outsing Habakkuk, and be continuing one long breve, an endless breve, after Habbakuk's song of nature has faded out of hearing, though even that song will recur when the wind is in the right quarter, and we shall hear the beauty of its music in all the centuries. Here we have in old Israel in a casket and a jewel too; we have household life, so to say, without poetic licence, household life underground. We make such mistakes about our dead. Who is dead? There are persons so ardent that no human nature can take hold of them. We regard even the Virgin Mary as dead. The woman is not dead. God is the God of the living and not of the dead. Who says dead? who has a right to assign finality? The

child is not dead, that little sweet lovely flower of yours is not dead; I hear a voice saying, It is well with the child. Why do we put the unseen away from us? Why do we think that because this or that is unseen therefore it is non-existent? Close your eyes on June's finest noonday, and then does it lie within your right to say that there is no sun because you have drawn down the lids of your eyes? I will think of God's universe, made out of His very heart, as living through and through, and of death as foiled in his own dark kingdom,—a trampled foe, an enemy overcome.

Are there any more caves in the Bible? Yes, there are many more caves in the Bible. There is a very historical cave mentioned in 1 Samuel xxii. 1—"David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam." That cave may be partly known to those unbiblical souls who are only politicians. What is this cave of Adullam, historically and symbolically interpreted? It is the assembly, I had almost said the church, of the disaffected. All the people who were not well-off went to the cave of Adullam; everybody that was in debt said, How do you do? to David in a kind of easy familiarity that had in it a possible begging. Every one who was discontented or thought himself injured, all the people who had grievances—and the man with a grievance lives in all centuries; you cannot kill him, you cannot poison him, you cannot make an end of him in any sort of way; he always comes back again; and when he heard that there was a cave of Adullam, and that it embraced all such people as he, the man went forward and was one of the leading characters in the cave. Never you set up a cave of Adullam, or if you do live in one be sure to seal the door. Your life's peace is at an end if anybody should ever get to hear that you have set up a cave for the disaffected. The disaffected are a countless multitude. Every man nearly has a grievance, and every woman has more than one, and even little children have their little sores and their little wounds and bruises which they are determined some day in some way to revenge. The cave of the disaffected—why do we not live a larger, sweeter, homelier life? Why are we not more fond of the open air and of the mountain winds and

songs than we are of whimpering over our grievances, saying, in some mock misery that strong, solid men reject: I am not appreciated, I am not understood, I am always left behind; other people may have privileges and little treats and enjoyments, but somehow or other I am always left out in the cold. I am glad to hear it; that is the very place where you ought to be left, and it ought to be much colder. We want sunshine and song and hope, and Habakkuk cries of victory in the wilderness made bare by desolating wind and blight. Christianity is the religion of hope, the religion of music, the religion of the morning. Are we misrepresenting it? do we really feel the power of the sacred fact that Christianity is the religion of thankfulness? In all things giving thanks: I will give thanks unto His holy Name: be joyful, hopeful, thankful. He who is thankful is—without making an investment of his thankfulness; then he would be despoiled and disappointed—increased in his very gladness because he does not withhold the song of gratitude but boldly speaks it in the face of listening heaven. Everyone has something to be thankful for; everyone has a reason for not going into the cave of Adullam.

Is there any other cave mentioned in Holy Writ? There is a cave mentioned in 1 Kings xviii. 4: "It was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah"—a man who feared the Lord greatly—"took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with"—all the luxuries he had, fed them with "bread and water." No man knows how sweet and good bread and water may be until he is driven before the fury of a terrific persecution and is made to feel that the necessities of life are its real luxuries. Then was the church of the fearful and the hopeless. Jezebel's anger burned, she has made a vow, and she will certainly carry it out; and good Obadiah, which was the governor of the house of Ahab, gathered together a hundred prophets, and said in effect, I will do all I can do for you; so I will put fifty here and fifty there, and you shall have over your heads only the roof of the solid earth; and I will come as often as I can, and you shall have good water and good bread, and you and I will dine together on that simple fare. So Obadiah, in

effect, heartened the prophets who are sinking fast. There are many persons in caves who ought not to be there, many persons distressed, hunted, and persecuted. If we could in some way or other take a little bread and water to them, we should be benefactors of the best sort. There are men in a cave who ought not to be there, because I know their learning and their faculty and their character so solid and sometimes even splendid; but because they did not happen to meet or please the passing fancy of the day they are come into the poorhouse cave, the workhouse neglect. If we could convey a little something to them it might help them to pray; they have not ceased their prayers altogether, but I notice a going-down in the tone of their utterance; they are more trying to pray than really praying, but if some Obadiah could come with a trencher of bread, and say, "You cut as long as that loaf lasts, and I will be back as soon as I can with another loaf," you would receive the thanks of such prophets in hearing a heightened tone; they would pray more sweetly, more confidently, they might almost break into a kind of sobbing song. Do something for those who are persecuted by the Jezebels of the day.

Is there another cave? Yes, a similar cave in 1 Kings xix. 9: Elijah came to a cave and lodged there, and glad to have such a lodgment. Sometimes a man is thrown down so squarely upon the rock as that; sometimes the Christian is closeted so closely with God as that,—as to have only a cave without a bed, a ground bed without a blanket. This is the church or retreat of the disheartened. There are more disheartened men in the world than we suppose. They have tried everything, and almost failed with everything. The effect of this has been a cloud over the household table, an interruption to the household music and confidential intercourse such as should prevail between man and wife and between parents and children. The story, sometimes so hopeless as to be not worth telling, is the same dreary monotone,—wandering the streets all day and getting noting worth getting, fishing all night and catching nothing, going out even at untimely hours

in the hope of being first on the ground, and finding there only a harvest of darkness and a field of disappointment, until there does settle upon the soul a kind of sourness and discontent. Do not blame these people too harshly; we may have been better circumstanced than they, we may have had more chances; we do not know what they have suffered in health, we cannot tell what it is to have spirits so depressed and distempered as theirs. It is easy to throw a hard stone, and it costs nothing to pelt with mud those who have failed to get a footing on the ladder of life. Do let us be more merciful; we might not have borne up so well as they have done if we had been in their circumstances. Charity never faileth. With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. There is nothing to my mind more detestable in a social way than that a man overfed and overpaid should heat his feet and his slippers at the glowing fire of a comfortable home, and tell of those who may be better than he and wiser who have yet not succeeded in grabbing so much land or in some honest or stealthy way in gathering together so much gold. I would by the power of the Spirit and grace of the redeeming Christ endeavour so to live as not to hurt any poor life that has struggled against fearful odds. When we come to die it will not be our kindnesses that we repent of but our harsh misinterpretations of other men. Better err on the side of generous interpretation than prove ourselves to be such mean souls as to be very clever and wonderfully shrewd in the detection of the errors of other men.

My friends, there are other caves, wonderful caves. "They wandered about in dens and caves of the earth." These are our supposed ancestors; we who have every comfort are supposed to be in the line of heredity which connects us with men of what I cannot but regard as another breed, a holier, diviner quality, and we ought to interrogate ourselves as to whether we have any right to be in this pulpit or that pulpit, or under this roof or under that roof, and whether we are in the succession of men who hazarded their lives for the Lord Jesus. In the old

old time they had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain by the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy); they wandered in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. Are we of that breed? Produce your marriage lines; produce your genealogy; let the sun in the high heavens shine upon your pedigree: and if you cannot prove your descent, alas! for false earldoms and paper principedoms. We must be born of the Spirit if we are to be of the seed of God. Happy day, speed Thy coming if Thou canst, when dens and caves shall be gardens, and gardens sevenfold in the loveliness of supernal summer!

I hear as you no doubt have heard with great interest and satisfaction that Her Majesty the Queen is coming in this direction this afternoon. I am thankful for such a movement. I do not venture to say that Her Majesty will call here, but I have given instructions that if she should do so she is to be offered the finest cup of tea that loyal hands can make, and it shall be so good that she may perhaps regret that her own Chancellor of the Exchequer has laid a little tax on that safest and best of the wines. Why should not Majesty sometimes look in upon a Nonconformist church? (Laughter.) By your kindly and sympathetic laughter you seem to think it impossible. With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. We do not know what may happen in other reigns further on in the centuries. Her Majesty has or has had Nonconformists in her Cabinet, in her army, in her navy, and on her battlefield: there ought to be nothing so terrifying in the idea that Her Majesty should look in upon scenes where such men have been trained and educated, though some of them may be perhaps somewhat ashamed of their ecclesiastical antecedents. No man has any right to be ashamed of such antecedents. He is not fit to be a member of the army or the navy or in the Cabinet. We must be prepared to suffer; compared with historical sufferers, we have endured nothing. I have heard with inexpressible delight that Her Majesty is about to visit Ireland. (Applause.) I wish the Royal Family could have visited Ireland much more frequently, for Ireland is part of the United Kingdom; Ireland should not be ignored or left

out in the cold. Her Majesty will have a grand reception in Ireland. The Irish are perhaps impulsive, impetuous, and sometimes they may be even rash, perhaps we might even add violent ; but they are a grand people at heart (applause), a generous, noble people, and they can appreciate every sign of interest that is shown in their welfare. Ireland is beautiful, I am told, as a country, and the people are full of genuine kindness, and when the war in South Africa is written historically Ireland is a name which will shine upon the record. I was in Ireland for about four-and-twenty hours, so I cannot say much about it personally, but I have read something about it, I have met a good many of its citizens, subjects of the Queen, residing in the Green Isle. I have been invited by the most influential memorial ever addressed to a preacher to go and preach in Ireland, and I have assured my Irish friends that I have only one difficulty in the way of accepting their invitation ; if they will remove that difficulty, I will, God helping me, go and conduct a mission in the Green Isle. That difficulty is the sea. (Laughter.) I am ashamed to confess it, but your geniality extorts from me this expression of my weakness. I love the sea—when I am on the top of a rock. Sometimes I become almost poetical about its blueness and its beauty of all manner of colours, simple and blended ; I never yet was on the sea, though I have crossed the Atlantic ten times, without ardently desiring all the time to get off it. Well, you may be men of like passions with myself ; “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” And thus we are interested in Her Majesty’s coming to the City and in her going to Ireland. There is nothing that concerns that Royal mother that does not interest all the sons and daughters and subjects of her illustrious throne. Let us stand up and sing “God save the Queen.”

[*Sunday Morning, 11th March, 1900.*]

Prayer.

MAY even we in all our littleness and weakness be enabled, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to take part in the great song which is sung unto Thee, Thou God of gods ; may there be no silent tongue, may every heart warm into music. Thou hast done great things for us, and we must be glad and speak forth our gladness in highest strains of grateful expression. We are in the house of the Lord and in His presence, we realise our manhood now ; we feel in very deed that we were made in the image and likeness of God ; we belong to a grand sum-total of things, we are not detached and isolated and alone, we belong to an innumerable company of angels, we consort with the assembly of the perfect in heaven. May we realise our greatness in our redeemed manhood ; may our hearts be lifted up in holy pride and in noble ambition ; show us somewhat of Thy glory as it is seen in the mild lustre of Thy goodness. We said we would come to worship God in common fellowship, and in one solemn shout would hail the Lord as our Father through Jesus Christ our only because infinite Saviour. We have thought of Thee at home and by the wayside, and in the market-place, and in the darkened chamber of affliction, and in the yard that is cut with graves ; yea, we have seen Thy going as it were on the wings of the wind, and we have heard the plash of Thy footsteps in the great sea. Most of all and best of all, by Thy Holy Spirit, we have felt Thy presence and Thy going in the sanctuary of our souls ; Thou hast enabled us to hold quiet wordless communion with Thee ; the Spirit has witnessed with our spirits, we have heard voices not to be heard by those who are outside the inmost sanctuary : why therefore should we be dumb in Thy courts or afraid to confess Thee before men ? If we look at the table, it is loaded with Thy bread ; if we look into the chamber of sleep, Thy benediction has been awaiting us, and will quiet and cool the throbbing brain ; and wheresoever we may look we shall see God, if so be we are in Christ Jesus, through whose name we come to the throne. Receive the thanksgiving of Thy people ; incline Thine ear to the petition of the weary and the disquieted and the utterly sad ; listen to those who would pray for the first time, and who would grope their way to the eternal throne ; hear the prodigal when he says he will come to his Father and pray unto Him to be forgiven. Graciously, in the power of the Holy Ghost, build up Thy Church, a strong living temple

outliving the storm, night and day steadfast because founded on the seven rocks of God. Pity us in our sinfulness ; we love sin, we have some kinship with the devil and love to be with him when he drinks his deepest, vilest cups. Thou knowest us ; we are sometimes ashamed of ourselves as amongst ourselves, we are always ashamed of ourselves when we look, as it were, upon the face of God. Thou knowest all our need and pain, Thou knowest how often we drink sacrament with Thee, Thou Son of God, in the garden of Gethsemane ; Thou knowest our poverty and loneliness and misery, our joy and our delight and our high song ; and as Thou knowest all we leave all to Thy tender care. Amen.

CCV.

MEMORABLE PLACES IN THE BIBLE.

II.—FIELDS.

GENESIS ii. 20.

“HE field.” We have not heard this word before, though there are many words that would seem to nearly say the same thing—things creeping upon the earth ; every living thing that moveth upon the earth ; every herb bearing seed, every tree, every green herb—but not quite the exact word “field.” There was a garden before there was a field : “The Lord God planted a garden.” There we have trees and a river, but nothing said about the field. And the Lord goes again to the ground, forms beasts and fowls of the air ; and then quite incidentally we read of “the field.” Perhaps it means nothing ; it is a common expression ; anybody might say it and think nothing more about it. Yet it is not so ; whatever the Lord has made has a meaning in it deeper than we may at first sight perceive. On Thursday last we wandered among the Caves of the Bible ; we found the cave where we find the field—in the Book of Genesis. Will the field ever become a poem ? Will any field ever gather around

itself suggestion, pathos, and divers elements coloured and ideal? or will the word always remain a kind of agricultural term? There is a field running through the whole Bible. At first we did not like this word field in one respect, because it would indicate something that is limited—a meadow, a patch of ground so small that you could not even with poetic licence call it anything of the nature and quality of an estate. Yet the Bible has a field of its own, made up of many other fields, full of green grass and meadows running through all the marvellous emerald. Do not dismiss any Bible word as if it were self-contained and self-limited; always look for the poetry of the word, its idealism, its symbolism, its sacramental significance, its historical root, and its harvest blessing. We read of more fields than one even in the Book of Genesis, where I have often told my fellow-students that everything can be found. Genesis is not a name given by chance; it is an alphabet, it is a great museum of initials, it is the book of beginnings; every flower is in it, and all the trees that shake on Lebanon have their roots in this fertile Genesis.

Take an instance; for example, Genesis xxiv. 63: "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide." The field was there long before Isaac was there; Isaac turned the field to right uses; Isaac went out into the fresh air and into the sunset hour which helps us to interpret green things with a new apocalyptic perception and power. What does the word "meditate" mean in the Bible? Does it signify musing and mooning and contemplating? Very seldom, if ever. This word "meditate" is a strong word, a kind of schoolmaster's and a kind of disciplinarian's word. When Paul said to Timothy, "Meditate upon these things," he did not say, Put your head between your hands and muse about these things concerning which I have written. He used another word altogether, and without introducing the more active element into the etymology of the word we shall be as those who fold their arms and close their eyelids and assume a posture or attitude of wise contemplation. Let us get done with that by adding to it and completing its meaning. The word that the

Apostle Paul used, and the word that is used in the Old Testament—the same word in spiritual effect—means, Think out these things with a view to putting them into practice. That gives a new meaning to many things. We say certain persons are fond of meditation; they are not, they do not know what meditation is; they are fond of doing nothing, fond of turning things over in their mind, fond of day-dreaming: but in the Christian sense of the term he who meditates is getting ready, is going to carry his thoughts into action; for a moment he meditates as if in mental tranquility, a moment afterwards he is on the battlefield, at the front. So many half-do things; they get one little corner of the meaning and think that they are well-equipped in the lore of Holy Writ. The young apostle was to meditate so as to be ready to preach next Sunday: ay, to preach that night; more, to preach to the next man. There are two aspects of meditation both of which are good, but the one is never good without the other. Meditation that leads to nothing is worthless, a practice that is not based upon deep thinking is not unlikely to be ineffective and futile. We want the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning. Does the musician study his instrument through books merely that he may reflect in some sort of twilight foolery about the beauty of the instrument? Is it enough to pay compliments to the instrument whose construction he has been studying? Certainly not; he must turn the instrument to account, he must breathe into it, and breathe his soul into it, and let, so to say, another and larger soul come out of it, a great wind from heaven, a wind full of fire. Are there not those persons who have been studying Christian evidences so long that they have never turned them into practice? Is it not possible to study the ten commandments most closely as to their etymology and yet never put one of them into real life? Does the surgeon student study physiology and anatomy merely through the medium of books? is it not with a view to healing, restoring, in a sense redeeming? He is no surgeon who knows things only by the book; he is a true surgeon who knows the book and then knows how to put the gathered wisdom of centuries into action. It is a poor sermon that has no application. The application is often the last thunder-

bolt. The whole law may be summed up in one word; said the most eloquent of the New Testament writers, "Of the things we have spoken this is the sum." So it must be through the whole circuit of our lives; knowing wisdom and practising it; knowing the Lord, and representing Him. He that saith he knoweth the law and doeth it not is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

There is another field mentioned in Genesis—my favourite Genesis, the harvest-field in which I have spent a lifetime. I think if I had to keep only one book I would keep Genesis. In Genesis xxix. 2 we read, "Behold a well in the field." What wondrous poets were these old Biblical bards! how they brought things together that apparently have little or no relation! what would the field have been without the well? and what is the use of a well if it has no field to water, no garden to fertilise? But when you bring in holy wedlock the field and the well together you will have no famine. Some men have an eye for the field and none for the well, not knowing that the two really belong to one another and mutually complete themselves. How is it that we see only some aspects of property and not others? The well may be the essential element. "A watered garden" is a Biblical expression; a watered field is a granary not built with stone, with slate, but a great granary filled by the great Creator with plentifulness of bread. The most learned and gifted man in the world may have a great field, and yet, notwithstanding his erudition and his great intellectual genius, if he has not a well in the field or near the field he will soon find that the field is worthless. Yet we speak of living in one world and for one world. Why, the world is many worlds, the one earth is many globes. We should study the wonderful conception of world within world. We say there is a wheel within a wheel, and that is right; but there is also a world within a world, a sevenfold world within the united world, and a million circles within the one wedding ring called the earth. We shall find no rest until we get into the unity and perfectness of things. Once the poet said, "And in the garden was a sepulchre." But observe where the sepulchre was;

it was in a garden. Many of us, being pessimistic, always drooping towards the earth like a wet sunset, would have seen the sepulchre only; it took a Christian poet to see that the sepulchre was in a garden. The great Poet, the Divine Creator, has put things into very singular and sensitive relation. Where you find the nettle you will find the dockleaf; where you find the sepulchre you will find the garden; where you find the field you will find the well. Why harp upon one side of the picture? why droop into uttermost dejection over certain sad features of the case? why not unite all the facets and make them into one gleaming diamond?

In Proverbs xxiv. 30 I find the field abused, yea, most shamefully entreated: "I went by the field of the slothful." The man had his chance, but the man was a fool; the king passed by, and the slothful man never saw him; the great opportunity came from heaven, and the foolish heart did not avail himself of that vital chance. There are some chances you never can renew. We say of this or that man, He has had his chance; he did not take the tide at the flood; no man ever began with better prospects; he wasted them, and those prospects will never return. There are some things that cannot be done twice. We must redeem the time; in other words, buy up the opportunity, and till the field at tilling time. It is not for us to say when we will go out into the field; the Lord does not leave everything loosely in our hands, and say to the agriculturalist of the land, Of course you can go out just when you please; do not let it for a moment distress you or overpress you with anxiety; whenever you feel disposed to go out into the field and sow seed—well, consult your own convenience. Never. And that is what He says in life. No man can have a second youth in the literal sense of the term. NOW! Whose now is that? God's. Are we so strongly bound down as these words would seem to indicate? Yes. We are free men—within a cage.

Now, if you compare two passages, you will find the terms are identical, and they are beautiful terms, dewy with poesy. In Isaiah xvi. 10, joy is taken out

of the plentiful field; in Jeremiah xlviii. 33, joy is taken out of the plentiful field. Both these great seers saw the same thing. But if the field is plentiful, why should the joy be taken out of it? Because of the sinful, repeated, perverse disobedience of the people. The Lord will take away the well; the Lord will send a blight upon the wheat; the Lord will cause the cankerworm to feed upon the children's bread, and the caterpillar shall displace the child of the household, wherein that child has been ruthless before God, hard-hearted, of a rebellious soul. This is the only thing that can be done to some people—they must be smitten through the flesh. There are some persons so self-degraded and self-depleted that you cannot reason with them; they have killed reason, they have utterly blunted spiritual sensitiveness; you cannot bring them to talk upon equal terms; to pray over them is to waste your breath; the Lord has forbidden His prophets to pray for certain people. How then can the Lord find His way into the consciousness of such people? By cutting their flesh, sending a blight upon their wheat-fields; by giving up the produce of the earth to palmerworm and cankerworm and destruction of every kind, so that they shall go out to reap, and can only thrust their sickles into darkness, and can bring back nothing but sheaves of despair. Are we who profess to be yet in the sanctuary and to be yet associated with the altar to have our religion, in so far as God has enabled us to cultivate any, smothered and stifled and killed by these utterest wretches, who, having slain their souls, can only be touched by the sharp dart that can pierce the leathern liver? We wonder that certain persons do not break down in tears, that they do not yield to gentle, persuasive, tender entreaty. Why should we wonder so? They have killed all that side of their nature; they have given it a strychnine that has killed it. Why ask them about religion? why ask them if they will go to church?—as if they knew the meaning of the word church, or the word prayer. These beasts of the earth can only be got at through the flesh they have poisoned and degraded. So the Lord will take away their wheatfields, their oliveyards, and their vineyards; the Lord will send a murrain upon their cattle, and, driven by poverty and stress of

every kind, they may begin to say, Why? And then there may be some inlet through which a wise word or a curative reproach may find its way. Do not imagine that all men are alike, that all men are equally near to God and near to Christ: some men have sinned away their opportunities, they have spent their lives in increasing the distance between themselves and God.

Now there is a field mentioned concerning which I could speak with some degree of pleasure because it is a great field. It is in Ezekiel xvii. 8, where I read that the Lord planted this or that plant, this or that nation in a good field "by great waters." The poet seems to be limited by these expansive limitations; it is a limitation that gets as near infinity as things material can get. What is the man or what is the nation? "A good field." Where is it? "By great waters." And the fields will drink the waters and express their thanks in luscious, succulent, nutritious fruits. Has the Lord not planted many a country like a good field growing by great waters? How favoured we are with all manner of noble and generous opportunities! What fruits we might grow, what noble trees we might be, what goodly vines we might represent! for we have a great field and great waters, fruitful soil and abounding fountains: let us rise to a consciousness of our opportunities, for our opportunities are our responsibilities. What some of us ought to be, considering our education, our wealth, our domestic comforts, our whole environment! Some men are wanting bread, and we have a plentiful supply; some men have had few chances in life, and our lives have been crowded with opportunities. In some senses it would appear as if we were the subjects of a divine favouritism; we cannot express the idea under any other word, though we are sensible of its exposing itself to perversion. You were born wealthy, you were born with a strong constitution, you were born in a warm house; though it was winter time when you were born, all the snow was melted away by the warm fires that were kindled to welcome you. What have you made of these great privileges and opportunities? Are you the man to snub some

poor creature who was born as it were in a stable that was to be let, born in poverty, in the deepest obscurity, to whom every day was a day of fighting and stress and difficulty? What men you ought to have been who were born under a warm roof and cradled and fondled and cherished with almost infinite tenderness and appreciation! I cannot get away from that field of the slothful; I cannot bear to see that tumbled wall and to almost feel those cruel nettles. It is a hateful thing to have such a field in any country, in any parish or district.

Preacher, is there not another field you can tell us about? Yes, there is; you find it in Luke ii. 8:—“There were shepherds abiding in the field.” What field? *The* field; not a field, but as it were a special field, cut out of the upper paradise. It should be kept green for ever. For it was to those shepherds that the heavenly voice came and over whom angels hovered. And the subject of that night interview was, The Saviour is born in Bethlehem.

[*Thursday Morning, 15th March, 1900.*]

Prayer.

AL MIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that the world has always been drinking of the same spiritual drink, to the refreshment of its heart and to the fertilising of its life. We bless Thee for the anonymous ministries which serve us with help we cannot always understand ; we thank Thee for the angels, nameless, mighty, yet willing to be overcome, with whom we have wrestled in the night-time and have awakened in the morning light with a new name and a new seal. It is wonderful what Thou hast been doing for the ages ; the ages are all one, they are an unbroken and ever-accumulating history. We thank Thee that the history of the ages is a providence, an argument, and an eternal hope ; may we never cut ourselves off from the current of history, from the fountain of motive and impulse, but every morning may we number ourselves with the innumerable company of angels that go forth to do the will of God. We bless Thee for our fathers wherein they were obedient, dutiful, loyal to the Eternal Throne : may we not disgrace our ancestors, may we cause no grave to blush as it were with pain and shame ; may we accept Thy providences day by day, whether dark and troubled, whether bright and peaceful, and may we know no will but Thine. This is the true martyrdom, this is the burning with fire, this the axe so heavy and so keen. Yet Thy grace is sufficient for all things ; that grace we have in Christ Jesus our Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, our infinite Redeemer, who gave us in His own sacrifice the true meaning of the blood which Abel's only signified. Amen.

CCVI.

BIBLICAL ROCKS.

"That spiritual Rock."—I COR. x. 4.



HAT is a curious expression. But for paradox and a startling way of putting things the Bible stands first amongst all books. To speak of a rock being spiritual at first almost shocks the imagination and our so-called sense of the fitness of things. But our imagination needs correcting, and our fitness is often unfitness. Unless we get into the way of the Bible, we shall be continually mystified and utterly stunned; we must find the Bible key before we can open the Bible lock. It is a long time in finding the Bible key in this poor world of ours; it will make keys of its own, it will not wait for the true key; therefore we have a thousand Bibles, and we live in whirl, and tumult, and constant uproar of contradictions and controversies. The Bible must be read in its own tone and in its own way if it is to give up its own meaning. Herein I fail to bestow my confidence upon those who regard the Bible as a piece of literature. The Bible may be literature, but it is something else, and something more, and something better; and until we master that further, that *plus*, quantity the Bible will be to us only a book in a row of books, instead of being a light shining apart in the radiance and glow of which no other book dare show its little twinkling spark.

The people who are referred to in this argument of the Apostle's in the tenth chapter of First Corinthians did not know what was following them. Who knows what is following him? Who can draw a true picture of his own shadow? Who can talk to the shadow which he himself throws upon the ground in the sunlight? We may in a certain limited sense be

men of intelligence, and we may have reserved for our own special use divers eulogistic and comforting terms; but herein we may have been acting foolishly. Who knows the ghost that is behind him? Who can interpret the spirits that are singing above him? We cannot tell anything as it really is; we make guesses, some of the guesses are clever and almost original, and give us a kind of fading fame in the esteem of our contemporaries; but if we come to central and essential matters, we must be taught, first of all, that we know nothing of the mystery of things, except as that mystery may be revealed to us by the superlative mystery known—and no other name will fit the personality—as the Holy Ghost. We are told by some persons that we ought not to read meanings into the Divine Word; I always retort, “And we must be equally careful not to read meanings out of it.” Our fathers did not know what that Rock meant; not for hundreds of years was the world to know why the rock moved and the name of the rock and the purpose of the moving. We must for some meanings wait until the centuries have whispered the secret in the ear of our broken heart. If our fathers did not know the name of the Rock, the personality, so to say, of the Rock, so it is with us in many providences, in many deaths, in many cold, deep, cruel, keyless graves. Some day when the century has struck the right hour we shall know names and secrets and meanings which to-day simply constitute an impenetrable and lowering cloud, darkening the path along which our soul-life reluctantly moves. We have discoursed upon the Caves of the Bible, upon the Wells of the Bible: why should we not now discourse for a short time upon the Rocks of the Bible, taking our cue from the words of the Apostle which we dare not have forged, so high their imagination, so deep their theology, the words of the text, “that spiritual Rock”? It is too high for us; there are other rocks we may climb, and in climbing the mountain rocks we may get some hint of the infinite Serbals which tower above the Sinais of the wilderness, and from these Serbals we may get the true history of spiritual meaning when life is represented by the rock or the rocks referred to in the Holy Book.

For example, in Exodus xvii. 6: "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink." It was a disastrous case; all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, and the people did chide with Moses, saying, Give us water, that we may drink. Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me. What am I to do? And the Lord said, Take with thee of the elders of Israel—the calmer, cooler heads—and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; ye shall find water for these complaining people. Water in unexpected places—that is ancient and modern history in one word, that is the world's experience gathered up in one pregnant sentence. This is happening to-day; you will find the water where you did not expect it; the door of your opportunity lay open when you did not suppose it possible to be open. It is the unexpected that happens, so we say, and in so saying we do but repeat the most ancient history in the world. You have been looking for water in certain places, and have found none; why not lay the case before the Lord, and tell Him plainly just how it stands, tell Him frankly, lovingly, how bewildered you are and utterly nonplussed? The Lord delights in seeing us in that condition. The Lord does not care for the clever man, He never spake a sweet word about him; He does not care for genius or learning or sagacity, or any of those things that we think make us men; it is when we come before Him with both hands dropped down and our tongue almost cleaving to our mouth, so that we are hardly able to say what we must say, namely, that we are simply nonplussed, simply at a stand-still, not knowing whether to go to the right hand or to the left hand, when there is not a mouthful of bread in the cupboard, when there is no water in the vessel;

then we realise what it is to be shut up to God. Whilst we have part of God and part of ourselves we are like the double-minded, who are unstable in all their ways, the orphaned, desolated, nonplussed, standing still, with no hope but God; then it is that the Lord appears and says to us, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I, the Lord, will hear them." The reason you and I do not possess the water we really need and thirst for is that we think that we can find a well somewhere ourselves; the Lord says, Let it be so; go forth and find it. Not until we come back, with our self-conceit burned out of us, and with a tongue that can say nothing but Lord, save me! do we find the Horeb we need, the Rock that has in it fountains of unsuspected water.

And this case is not solitary. If we read Exodus xxxiii. 21, we shall come upon the same thought: "Behold, there is a place for me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock." What is the meaning of that rock? The meaning is, outside sanctuaries, so-called unconsecrated sanctuaries. Thou dost desire a vision which may not be granted unto mortal eyes in a mortal state; not until corruption has put on incorruption can thy prayer be answered: meanwhile make the rock a standing place, stand there, wait there, and look, and behold My glory thou shalt not see, but My goodness, the hinder parts, the back of the glowing garment, not glory now, but goodness, and goodness as a pledge of glory. That is how it stands. We want to see the glory now, and we cannot do it; we want to be perfect now, and we cannot be perfect now; but we can struggle towards perfectness, we can cry out with a strong voice, and say, Lord, show me Thy glory! and if we only get goodness instead of glory, that is enough. Aim high. O thou son of God, wouldst thou see the goodness of thy Father? Cry to have all heaven opened to thee that thou mayest see the throne and the Deity; this thou shalt not see, but much of the goodness, the tenderness, the pity, the mercy; and if thou hadst uttered some meaner prayer thou shouldst have had some narrower vision. Offer a big prayer, and there will be a great answer; have a noble desire, and God will

do all He can for thee in thy little cage. It is not that God would begrudge thee anything, but the cage is not big enough to receive it. Once there was a man who asked and received, and regretted it; God made him an example to the ages, he had a sudden vision of God, and fell as a dead man at the feet of the new Personality. I turned, I looked, I saw, a flash of the glory blinded me, and I was as a dead man at the feet of the very person I had long desired to see. Do not pray for sudden revelation; sudden visions may be sudden death. Take life gradually, little by little, a day at a time; and thou shalt see wonderful things yet.

In Numbers xxiv. 21 we read, "Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock." Secure refuges; it is not enough to have the nest, we must have the rock to put it in. There are some people that have a great nest, but they put it in the wrong bank, they put their gold in bad hands, and they never can find the gold any more. Now you must have your nest in a rock. By nest, mean life, home, purpose, policy, fortune, whatever it may be that constitutes the true wealth of the soul; it is not enough to have it, thou must put thy nest in a rock. Not a strong rock only, but a high rock, right away so that the clouds are beneath it, and the stars all but stumble against it; a great strong rock. Put thy child there, thy dearest one, the heart that makes the whole world a livable and enjoyable home; and put your wealth there, according to the Sermon on the Mount, put it where moth and rust do not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Put your faith above your creed. The creed is a changeable document, which may be variously read by various grammarians. Have nothing to do with grammarians; they are men that do not understand the soul, and to do them justice they do not profess or pretend to understand it; they have a sphere, but it must be severely limited. Only God can understand the soul, and the soul must have daily, incessant communion, fellowship, with the living One. That is keeping the nest in the right Rock.

There have been other rocks than the right Rock.

For example, in Deuteronomy xxxii. 31 we read, "For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." This is what is meant by comparative religion, or religions that are compared and contrasted with one another. The typographer here deserves a passing compliment, for he prints thus:—"For their rock"—rock with a small *r*, and that *r* too big for the place—"is not as our Rock," Rock with a capital *R*—"even our enemies themselves being judges." They come to us now and again and say that a great wind has blown part of their rock down: we never go to them and say that our Rock has been endangered by the wind. Our Rock is an eternal refuge; even the enemy comes at the last to say, humbly, and therefore the more acceptably, "Yours is the right Rock; we did not think so, once we adopted a rock of our own, it looked noble, and so far as we could see it looked everything that a rock should look, but having lived with it in youth and in old age, in wealth and in poverty, in sickness and distress, in the garden of a high imagination and in the wilderness of a terrible experience, our rock is not as your Rock; and we say so, and we would be dishonourable cowards if we said anything else; your Rock has done for you what our rock has never been able to do for us." Beware of false refuges, beware of gossamer safes in which you supposedly lock the deeds of your little property and the gold which you use in the current day. Never mistake a cobweb for something made of steel, and never suppose that any metal is superior to flame, fire that searches all things, and leaves only the good and the true behind it. Do not live nominally, do not live in paper places, do not live in summer-houses; get chambers to live in that are fit for the summer and fit for the winter; never build a house for one season of the year; take in the whole situation of life, and quit you like men; so have your lamps burning that no wind can blow them out, and so have your houses grounded that no storm can throw them down. You should read this xxxii. chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy when you have got done with your light reading. This xxxii. chapter of Deuteronomy is the Rock chapter: "He is the

Rock, His work is perfect ;” “ He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock ;” “ he lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation ;” “ of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful ;” “ except their Rock had sold them ;” where is the rock in whom they trusted ?—that other, mean, flabby, wretched rock that was only a pretence, labelled mud : where is it ? Live in that xxxii. chapter of Deuteronomy, and you will have new securities and new fountains of refreshment.

The Psalmist says, in Psalm xxvii., “ He shall set me up upon a rock.” The Psalmist had had a hard time of it, and then a joyous time. He spoke about the times of trouble, and he spoke about the time of destruction and his enemies, and he saw them in imagination all round about him ; and then he said, in the midst of the whole survey, “ He shall set me up upon a rock.” Final triumphs, final deliverances. This is what it must come to in the end. You have enemies. Yes. The wicked and your enemies and your foes will come upon you to eat up your flesh. Yes. A host shall encamp against you. Yes. What then ? In the time of trouble—pavilion, tabernacle, hide me as upon a rock. And the enemies will say, Where is that man ? we thought to overthrow him : where is he ? Yonder, on a rock. Do not be discomfited by your passing experience ; you are in great trouble to-day, the enemy seems to have everything just as he would like to have it ; but then there is to-morrow coming, and the third day—that jewel day, that day of morning : think of that, and be strong. Once, when Jesus Christ wanted to put His case with the greatest possible effect, He went back as it were to Exodus and Deuteronomy, to Numbers and the Psalms, where we have been this morning, and He said, “ Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.” I think we might translate the passage, His house upon *the* Rock. Was not the dear Saviour talking about Himself when He was talking about the Rock ? Is there any other Rock but Christ ? All else is sand. You can build, but if the building is not on the Rock I do not think any wise insurance office would accept your application for insurance.

They say that houses built upon the sand may sink and utterly disappear in one short dark night. You can build a house upon the sand; it belongs to the greatness of man to make a fool of himself now and then. If a man could not make a fool of himself occasionally he would not be a man. That may appear to you to be somewhat grotesque, but it is a great and vital philosophy. If a man could not go astray he could not be a man in the highest and divinest sense of the term. He is entrusted with the terrible power of doing wrong; he has the power to do wrong, but not the authority. To be a man he must be able to disobey God; to be a man with free will, noble will, responsive will, he must have it in his power to dash his fist in the face of God. The power of blasphemy belongs in a secret subtle way to the power of prayer. We may therefore build our house upon the sand, but the winds will drive it, and the floods and the great rain and the manifold storm; what we are advised to do is to build our houses upon a rock. Build the life-house upon a great solid stone which cannot be moved. See that the foundation is right. There are times when the foundation would seem to be everything. Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone. And we may build upon the foundation wood, hay, stubble, or gold and silver, precious metals of all kinds, and the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is. It is not enough to have done some work, we must have done it well.

May we never know the meaning of the expression, "They shall call upon the rocks and the mountains to fall on them." May that be one of the unexplained and inexplicable texts of the Bible! In making our daily annotations upon the living margin of the living Bible may we miss that verse, as having no idea what it can possibly mean. I spend nearly the whole of my life in making marginal notes upon my study Bible, and it is to me very profitable reading. Some of the verses I am obliged to leave, I cannot understand their language, I cannot rise or fall to their meaning. That to me is the most valuable book I have ever attempted, to take my heart and set it on the margin of the Bible verse by verse; and I shall publish it in

a few months, and you shall be my companions in the study as you have been my companions in the church; and there you will see some blanks, and when I come to that verse, "Fall on us!" I must leave it blank, and let the emptiness be the best annotation.

Christ is the "spiritual Rock." Christ was in the wilderness with our fathers. Christ will give us security, Christ will be the Rock on which we shall stand up when the enemies are dead. Christ is the Rock of Ages. Where do you find that expression? Tell me where did Toplady or any other poet get the expression, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me"? Is it in the Bible? Yes, and No. Surely Rock of Ages must be a Biblical expression? Will you find it? Then why say it is in the Bible? Because it is not in the English Bible unless it be as a marginal suggestion. But it is in the Bible: I have heard you singing one of those grand rolling resonant anthems which often cheer the church, "In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Literally render it, as it ought to be,—The Lord Jehovah is the Rock of Ages. There is a time when we need all the ages, and need to have them gathered up into one great eternal Rock.

[*Sunday Morning, 1st April, 1900.*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that we have heard of the old way and of the new and better way. Thou hast done wondrous things for mankind ; Thou hast trained man by mysterious grace as well as by mysterious power. Thou hast watched Thy child, Thou hast considered him morning, noon, and night ; he has been on Thine heart like a seal, and on Thy mighty arm as a token, and all the coming and going centuries have not diminished Thy love. We are in Thy house to hear about Thy gospel ; we listen for messages from Thine own heart ; we come and pray for the messages in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the name ever-prevailing. We would receive much of heaven into our hearts ; we accept the spring-time as a token and a pledge ; because the spring has come the harvest will surely also come. We will therefore approach Thy throne with song, with praises unutterable and full of grateful affection. We remember all Thy love, we recall Thy tears, we live in Thy mercy. There is not a man living that hath not sinned ; there is none righteous, no, not one ; but the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin. It is our answer to the law, our reply to all self-reproach, and it is our great appeal in the day of distress and inability. May we expect the great token of Thy love with the spring flowers : hast Thou not in those very flowers given us already a great token ? Because one flower has come other flowers may be expected immediately. The spring is ready to break forth upon us in all the fulness of its vernal beauty : may there be spring in our hearts, summer in our souls ; may we live under the great noonday sky of Thy love and Thy conscious presence. If we name with shamefacedness and brokenness of heart our sin and our folly, it is with a sob of repentance and with a cry for mercy. There is no man living that hath not sinned ; each man, knowing himself, says, God be merciful unto me a sinner ! and Thou dost not hear a call upon Thy mercy without instantly responding : mercy is Thy delight ; to forgive is the supreme pleasure of God. Break us all down in contrition and true sincerity of tearfulness, that we may afterwards arise to know that our sins, which are many, are all forgiven us in the name of Christ, and that henceforward by Thy grace and by Thy love we are freemen of the universe, having the liberty of Thy blessing and Thy smile. Some have come with great distress, thinking that mayhap they may find some balm in this Gilead and catch sight of the Physician that is

there. Their hearts are very sore, and they dare not tell all their grief, they dare not speak it audibly to their own ears ; they are much cast down : but they have heard of Jesus and the Cross and the pardon that is offered in return for repentance. Disappoint them not, make them glad again ; they had gladness in childhood, but they have none now, because they have sinned, they have outraged the heavens, they have trodden Thy commandments under foot ; but now they are sorry, they are in want, they cannot get healing anywhere : so they have turned into Thy sanctuary because they have heard that Jesus is there. Some are full of prosperity and plentifulness, they have more than heart could wish, their eyes stand out with fatness, and they hope to be true to God because of their thankfulness for His great mercy. Sanctify all riches, create and sanctify the spirit of stewardship, and may all men count it the sabbath of their lives, the high festival day of their lives, to help some other man. Some are weary and distressed because the week has yielded no harvest ; they have beaten upon many doors, but no friendly face has come to look at the knocker ; they have knocked and not been answered, and they wonder why it is. Others are frivolous ; to them life is a foolish laugh : the Lord pity the fool ! Now hear us for those who are far away, on the sea, over the sea, fighting, working, wandering, prodigal sons, the wreck of their houses. God save the Queen ; establish her throne, multiply her days, and make her glad with the consciousness of Thine own kingly presence. And the Lord pity this poor wilderness world, and for Christ's sake turn it into garden-land. Amen.

CCVII.

WOUNDPRINTS.

“ He shewed unto them His hands and His side.”—JOHN xx. 20.



ANDER what circumstances was this revelation made ? The answer is in the context : “ The same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” He would have ended there ; no man could pronounce that word peace as Jesus Christ could

pronounce it; the people ought to have known from the utterance of that benediction who it was that spake unto them. But they were not yet fully spiritualised. Probably they knew the voice, but scarcely heard it; yet it was the old voice, womanlike, manlike, God-like. When He said "Peace be unto you" they should have known who it was; but there was probably internal questioning, partial doubt, and great struggle of emotion. Was this the Christ after all? was this a simulation or a positive presence? were they in a trance? Jesus Christ always interpreted the unuttered doubt, the unexpressed fear; He knows and reads the heart and answers its silent questions. So, when He had thus spoken, and watching the doubt that was struggling to keep itself back, He showed the disciples His hands and His side. They were still in the flesh, they were still in this body space, this miserable time cycle; so they could not follow the spiritual music of peace; they needed visibleness, demonstration, what they would call actuality. When man cannot read the poetry of his life God forces a fact upon his purblind eyes.

These wounds were silent arguments. His hands and His side had an eloquence unapproachable. They were arguments cut in form and figure. Some men have been able to cut stone into poetry and words into music. There has been no speech, no appeal to the ear; the whole appeal seems to have been directed to the vision of man, to vision at its best, to the vision that has a vision within, a keener vision than can be revealed by the eyes of the body. Have we learned to interpret silence? do we know the still music? do we know the subtle spiritual music that despises language, and so to say sings and shines? Or has God yet so to cradle us in the nursery of His love that He has to instruct us by toys and symbols and figures written on lighted canvas? Is it so? What men we might have been if we had been true to our dower and our responsibility! Silence will always have a place in the great ministry of the universe. There should be more silence in public worship. I would prize two moments of silent silence quite as much as I would prize any utterance of sweetness and power on the part of man or his

musical instruments. But the fools will not have it; they do not know the magic of silence, the mystery of the inexpressible, the look that condenses into one desire of the eyes all liturgies and all doxologies.

This was not only a silent argument, it was a visible answer and argument. He showed them His hands and His side. Then doubt was set at rest; He could not have made those wounds Himself; those wounds had a history, a meaning which it will take all the centuries of duration to explain: they were the devil's signature; but, gathered up by God's love, that which was intended as mischief was turned into a redemption; He maketh the wrath of devils to praise Him, and the remainder thereof He shuts up in a hell of His own making. We want visible arguments. We should be able to say concerning this man and that all over the Christian Church, that man represents Christ. If there be no speaker at hand who has mastery of words and metaphors, so as to get the argument into the intellect and the imagination, there ought to be men everywhere who re-incarnate the Christ and stand for Him. That is the idea; it may not yet have come to fruition, but it is not despicable. The progress made by Christianising influences of the time is a great substantial progress. The worst Christian—oh that the words should ever have been married!—may be better than the primest savage you could find in cannibalism, and in some respects better than the finest sage you may find in mere paganism. If a man has really come under the Christian faith, has really received high influence, it would seem, thanks be to God, almost impossible to make him again what he was; he may become a wreck again, but the wreck of a palace, the wreck of marble that Phidias has made beautiful. Many men cannot defend their Lord in language. Language is the greatest deceiver known to man; it is ambidextrous, it can work with both hands and serve two opposite parties and two opposite causes; it is a liar. But conduct can be tested; the visor of hypocrisy can be torn off, or it may sometimes slip aside, and we see the beast it has been vainly trying to conceal. But in the long run conduct vindicates itself, conduct or character becomes an argument, and we say, Whence

hath this man this moral practical wisdom? we know him; why, we used to drink with him, gamble with him, swear with him; is this the same man? Ay, no: "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature; old things have passed away, and all things have become new."

What Christ did to the disciples on the occasion referred to in the text the Church should always be doing all the world over. How is the Church to be known? By its wounds. I have heard of respectable churches: never trust them, never believe them. I have heard of those who have made a decoration of Christianity; it is all bejewelled and bedizened and tricked out in various finery and in divers ways known only to the cunning of a perverted imagination. That is not the Church. O thou decorated pretender, show us thy hands and thy feet; out with your hands, and bare your side, this is a decency that sanctifies all other conduct; show the woundprints and thus give final and emphatic and gracious proof of the identity of Christ. Christ is re-incarnated, I repeat, in His people. We ought to be able to say, He who has seen a Christian has seen Christ, one who represents Christ in his own degree and capacity and particular. Just as the finite may symbolically—a kind of spiritual algebra—by many means typify or represent the infinite. That is the distance between Christ and the archangel—infinity; and yet the archangel may be on the right line and moving in the right direction, though this asymptotic movement never impinges or touches upon the circle which it is apparently endeavouring to bring into vital contact. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God and whether they be of Christ; insist upon seeing the hands and the side; do not believe in logic and rhetoric or pretence or ritual or ancestral claim; away with the whole of them, and now show us your hands and your side. Let me hear some talk of the parties on the other side of this wondrous line of separation and distinction:—"I belong to the Church, because I have this elaborate and ancient creed; it was written hundreds of years ago, and I belong to this creed." That is nothing; proceed, give us your proofs. "I have a rich store, I might call

it a library, yea, and a vast and valid literature of specific traditions, and when I want to know by which handle I should take the sacramental cup I go and consult the traditions, and I find that in the third century such and such was the practice of the Church, and I always follow the instructions of tradition, and therefore I claim to be a Christian." That is rottenness; into the fire with it, and the hottest part of the fire! "I have great buildings, consecrated buildings; whenever I go into those buildings I feel something come over me that I do not feel anywhere else; I would not for the world leave those buildings." Get out of them; that is no proof that you are a Christian: give me some weightier testimony, and then come back to your buildings, and then read your traditions with enlightened eyes, and then peruse your creed with sanctified vision; show me more. More what? More proof. Of what sort? Wounds; show me your hands and your side. Sacrifice is what God requires; not the blood of bullocks and of goats and all the wearisome ritual which was inevitable at the time in which it was practised, but the sacrifice of a broken heart, the sacrifice of true penitence, the sacrifice of profound and loving obedience. O sir, show me—I will try to show you—hands and side, woundprints.

Oh that I could show the woundprints of a mortified body! Mortify, therefore, your members, one by one; cut them off, pierce them, never mind the wounds being represented by torn flesh; take any metaphor that is strong enough to get this body killed. Some men are drunk in every pore of their skin; some men breathe lasciviousness and all evil thoughts and cruellest practices. If they look upon a child, they wither the little flower; that must be cut to pieces, cut out, and a great wound left behind. So with our ambition. We are being educated provisionally by the destruction of ambitions that lift us out of our proper sphere and level. "I will be rich": God will cut thy purse-strings in two, and they only shall be left in thy palsied hand. "I will be a great man in the state, in the Church, in society": God will stain the pride of thy glory. If

thou wouldst be a true child of His, He that saveth his life shall lose it, he that loseth his life in the right way shall save it ; we live by dying ; we die into life, we languish into immortality. God may be dealing most educationally and structurally with us in the degree in which He is piercing us with sharp knives and throwing down towers of our building when they are about ten feet high. We left them yesternight full twelve feet high ; we came out at dawn this day, and lo ! the stones had not only been thrown down, but ground to powder, and not only pulverised, but the powder has been scattered to the east wind and blown away. Is God Love ? Yes. Was it kind on the part of God to throw down my little tower twelve feet high ? It was. How do you make that out ? Because that is part of His way of making a man. The man has, like wine, to be emptied from vessel to vessel ; the man, like the vine, has to be pruned and cut to pieces. Man has to be disappointed in order to be taught that he is not God. Man is only to have one little key by which he can open a very small door ; God does not trust him with all the keys, and say, Take all these keys, and open what doors in the universe you like. God hands us one little key, and sometimes He puts a speck of dust into the lock that it was intended to open, and we cry over our disappointment like disheartened children, and we say, Is this love ? And a sweet angel voice says in whispers that find the soul, Yes, this is love ; you will know it by-and-by. If we are thus trained and educated, thus sanctified and elevated, then men may doubt our theology, but there should be no doubt about our character. Theology may vary its terms ; morality never changes ; it is the second commandment, and like unto the first, of the same fibre and tissue and divine quality. A distinguished unbeliever said to Charles Kingsley, "I came to Christ through my heart long before I came to Him through my head." Character is the supreme argument. Only Christ, we say, could build such and such manhood ; no ordinary man put together that temple of soul and mind and motive and purpose ; let us be fair, let us be just, stand the sky or fall it, no man could have made a man so superior to himself ; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Where a man has suffered for his faith the presumption is that his sincerity is unimpeachable. We have had

martyrs, confessors, witnesses of high name and great force of thought and speech. Christ has His army of wounded men. Happily, such wounds never lead to death, but always from death we are wounded to live.

And what Christ expects of us He Himself has first shown in grand and majestic example. God has suffered for His Church; the history of God is a history of suffering, and therefore a history of sorrow, and finally a history of sympathy. God suffers for us every day. God takes the right view of our falls and wounds; God is, through Jesus Christ His only begotten Son, going to turn our apostasies, if we have to fall, into great realisations of character; we should be the better, under the mercy of God, for our very fall. That is what is meant by falling upwards. That word "fall" is not to be interpreted in the usual cant phrase of the last five-and-twenty years, that the fall of Adam was a fall upwards; it is true of the fall of every soul that God has made that it may be turned into an upward movement. This is a great mystery and hardly to be explained in words, but it is a great experience and can be lived out to the last throb of the last letter.

What a call is here, my brethren, that we are to show our hands, our woundprints, our credentials of the Cross. When that is realised we shall have a different state of Church life; sometimes then, in that sunny and millennial day, Christian people of various denominations may at least move to one another in token of mere civility; there will come a spirit of masonry over the whole Church, and men shall say to one another, I ought to know you; if I breathe the password can you identify it? I will give you five-and-twenty words, and I will learn whether you know the real keyword if you will allow me to do so. And there are great moods in which men who never saw one another before are made friends instantaneously, for the occasion at least. The other day, when certain news came from the field of war, it was so cheering to the heart of the country that men who never knew of each other's existence five minutes before clasped hands. There are uniting forces in our higher life. It is not necessary to be introduced unless we

are going to live icily and in the castle of suspicion. The men who in London the other day were almost embracing one another and singing gladly with heart and voice and soul and shaking hands and passing on the signals of comradeship and patriotism were not introduced. To be introduced!—If that is it no wonder we are separated by walls of ice and have no wish to reduce them by fire. Let us pray for the higher enthusiasm, the divinest inspiration, in the influence of which men shall know one another by many tokens not to be put into words and not to be figured in forms, but we shall know by an accent, by a tone, by a look, that we are not far from home. And when the unbeliever would challenge us to produce evidence of our identification with the Christ, the highest compliment he can pay us is “Thy speech bewrayeth thee.”

[*Thursday Morning, 5th April, 1900*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless Thee that Thou art everywhere ; where Thou art there is the house of Thy protection and Thy love. We thank Thee that we have been in the House of the Lord ; we have tasted of the fatness of Thine house ; Thou hast provided music for Thy guests, music that finds the soul. We bless Thee for the restorative power of Thy gracious providence. It rebuilds us, it brings our youth back again, it is a renewal, so that we only end that we may begin, we only die that we may live. How can we thank Thee ? Lebanon is not sufficient to burn if we would express our gratitude in incense and fire and offering of sacrifice. Thou hast indeed done all things well : it is well with the man and with the woman and with the child. But we do not know yet what well means ; we are so ignorant, so narrow-minded, so self-regarding, that we cannot interpret God. God is love, God is a consuming fire, God is a sun and a shield. Yet from Him the wicked flee away and they who have a lie in their hearts try to enwrap themselves in darkness. Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us—sensitive Spirit, Spirit full of conscience and full of desire after righteousness. The Lord set up His standard in our hearts and write His testimony upon our souls and give us to feel that there is nothing worth living for but the glory of the holy Name. Wean us from the world ; work in our souls a high contempt for time and space and things measurable, and give us through the power of the Christ, yea, the blood of the Son of God, that sight that sees the unseen and invisible, and the soul that believes in God, whether King or Father or Shepherd or tenderest Mother. Amen.

CCVIII.

DRAWN TO SCALE.

"My Shepherd."—PSALM xxiii. 1.



HIS man seems to have come very nearly to a sight and touch of God. The familiarity of his address is appalling, but after long experience, it becomes a revelation, a beautiful disclosure of the very heart of God. They are quite right, no doubt, who speak of God under epithets that have come by-and-by to unmake Him; they are right because they begin at a distance, they do not plunge into the ineffable Presence; so they begin with tawdry epithets, adjectives, that have no piety in them, only architecture and sculpture and some touch of colour badly mixed and apt to be inexpressive. So we hear of God being majestic, infinite, eternal, ineffable: all these words are quite right, but they are poor compared with the words we shall use by-and-by when we are more accustomed to the personality and the presence and the sovereignty which they are intended somewhat to express. There is a greater word than majestic; that word is condescending. Only the majestic can condescend. Vermin cannot condescend; things that are without sense of moral dignity cannot stoop. It was when Jesus stooped that He made that poor woman white and young again, and sent her back a stainless lily. But in our half-culture we do not see the real stretch and scope of greatness; we think of constellations as syllables in the infinite polysyllable. Who thinks of the greatness of mercy, pity, tears, willingness to help? Who calls him great who goes out in the midnight storm to fetch back again the strayed lamb? We have been trying to fit the thunder with a collar on which is written Greatness, but we shall find by-and-by that the whisper of the heart, the tremulous, nervous, thrilling whisper of love, is more thunderous than thunder and is grander than all the

built greatness of the universe. The Psalmist has come to see God as a Shepherd; it took a poet to dream that word in that connection. We shall presently write our own religious literature; experience will be typographed, and we shall see new books and a new apocalypse.

Not only did the Psalmist speak of God as Shepherd, he said, "My Shepherd." It is the pronoun that helps the true emphasis of the designation. Think of it! "My Shepherd"—as if this individual Psalmist had appropriated the Deity. Yet it is quite in accord with the deepest experience and the most ideal observation. Of the sun in the heavens every little child might say, as he bathes his little fingers in the great flame, The sun is my sun; and yet everybody's sun, and the little child's sun all the more truly because it is everybody's light. He does not take God away from others, he makes others feel how tender and how near God may be, though we have been searching for Him with lamps and candles and lanterns, whilst He was blazing upon us from every star that gleamed in the under heavens which we call the sky. How difficult to define personality, especially in relation to the Divine nature! This is a most mysterious subject. Personality—yes, repeat the word again and again, till you get its music into your soul. What is a person? No one knows. How would you define personality? Nobody can define it. We make little ladders, up which we climb if haply we may see over some great wall and know what is on the other side. There are undefinable terms; we need them all to eke out the poor, mean mintage of words. What would language be but for the undefined terms and the terms undefinable? and what would thought be but for the thought that cannot be thought? Yet there stands up a newly baptised thing, baptised with gutter water, calling itself agnosticism: as if agnosticism were not the fundamental line running through much of our deepest religious experience. The theologian who has bound everything, if it can possibly be defined even in mere hints, says, A person is an intelligent agent. What a delightful confusion! Why not leave it undefined, as you leave some adjectives undeclined, and some nouns you write down as un-

declinable, and some vocatives you describe as wanting, yet we cannot do without the vocative, the exclamatory, the admiring, that which expresses amazement. We must always worship an Unknown God, if we force terms into all their deepest and widest meanings. God is known in Christ, but Christ is not known in all the infinity of the music of His name. So what do we do but grope our way from one point to another, and say to this man and that brother, Hast thou found a stone on which we can both stand? That is education, that is training, that is the road to the fullest and most useful culture. What is personality? Leave it undeclined, because undeclinable. Yet you know what it is, and cannot tell. Why, this poor thing we call man would be a poor shell if he could define his own kernel. We live in mystery, we live in the sky as much as on the earth, and would have no earth if we had no sky; the earth is the child of the light. Yet we have glints and gleams, and sometimes we are on the point of crying "Eureka! I have certainly found it." And then when we gather ourselves together to speak out all our religious history, we say, "I did see it clearly just one moment ago, but for the time being I am the subject of a great intellectual eclipse, and the thing that made me glad like a new light has escaped me and left a deeper darkness in the spirit which it filled with glory; I do not know God, I have never seen God, I cannot define God; yet I know Him and have seen Him and can define Him." Both the statements are perfectly true, as men well know when they grow in spiritual experience. Blessed be God for the things we cannot tell; thanks to heaven for the religion we cannot define! Yet how great its ecstasy, how disciplinary its influence, how it binds us to duty, how it puts ambition in its right place, and how it teaches the art and the science of holy and prevailing prayer.

Some things we can do; let us see one or two of them.

You know what it is to look upon a map that is drawn to scale. I could give you, as you could give me, a map of South Africa not larger than one little page of

a medium-sized book. How is that map to be read? By the scale. Where is the scale? In the corner of the map. What does it say? It says, Scale in inches, half-inches, according to miles; so that an eighth of an inch may be ten miles off, an inch may be a continent. But you must always have the scale with you, do not trust to your uncertain vision; what an eighth of an inch is in the north, an eighth of an inch is in the south, and on the east, and on the west. That little scale goes with you from point to point, and you must not change; that is your guide and your key. And so there are many indicative signs and measurements in the great map of Divine revelation. Always keep the scale with you; do not be making scales and inventions of your own; do not stretch the measure; keep exactly to the scale that is laid down; or all your inquiries will end in confusion and blunder. We must often say this or that little line represents ten miles or a hundred miles; a dot on the map or globe celestial may be a planet; three little dots may be a triangle of constellations on which no measuring line has ever been laid. Keep to the scale. The scale in relation to God is a scale of love, pity, tears, sympathy, law, righteousness. Do not make any little patent scales of your own; do not say, "As I see it," "As I view it," "As it seems to me." If you have a scale please keep to it. We cannot keep the sun under one roof, yet every garden is welcome to all the sunshine it can hold. Quite right; the sun is the great giver, and gets no poorer. So with the idea of God. Each man may have his own idea or conception of the Divine Being. God appeals to different men in different ways, without for a moment altering the scale of His movement or the quality of His being. Why, there are some poor souls who would be killed outright if God were to plead with them with His great power; so He speaks a word in season to him that is weary. As the God of compassion, He says, This poor broken-hearted creature would be crushed if I were to lay My hand squarely and solidly upon him; he is so frail, his faith is so attenuated, his experience is so superficial and uninstructed with the large learning of experience; he is but poorly equipped; so I will be to him as a shepherd, I will surround Myself with the

environment which he has been accustomed to look upon; his father is a shepherd, his father has a shepherd's crook in the house, his father says, I have lost a sheep to-day, and I must rise with the sun to-morrow that I may find it: If I can whisper into his soul that I am just a shepherd, I shall recover his youth; he who has been scabbed and fretted with unbelief shall be dipped into this Jordan of the new revelation of experience, and his flesh shall come again like the flesh of a little child, and he shall be clothed with the beauty of youth. David was a shepherd, and he was enabled to transfer his own occupation to the Divine nature, and to say, As I am a shepherd to these little flocks, so God is a Shepherd to my soul; as I take care of the least and feeblest of my flock, so God takes care of the least and feeblest of His enfolded ones; yea, though they may have escaped for a moment the security of the fold they will be brought back, and passing under the rod, shall be numbered with the flocks of Israel. A most useful thing it is to have some transcript of God even in our own occupation. The builder says, God builds my soul; the husbandman says, God keeps the field of my life and sows it with precious wheat; and the teacher says, As I am to these little scholars, so God bends down to my ignorance and gently and cordially removes it until the page I was struggling with became an epistle addressed almost exclusively to my own heart—God's letter with God's signature. Another man says: I cannot get so near to God as that, but I can call Him by a name that is full of dearness and holy suggestion to my own soul, I can call Him what the man of old called Him, My father's God. Then there is only one remove between myself and God. Maybe so; take heart: was He your father's God? Yes, I am sure of that beyond all that is known of human certainty; I watched the old man; I seemed to see him grow in grace; he was always strong, then he became tender, and then he became so loving that he could have died for any one of us his little children. My father always called upon the name of God; he never took a journey or fought a battle or entered a new enterprise or began a new department of business without falling on his knees and asking

God whether it was right and good or not, and the Lord never withheld the rain from my father's fields; and my father concluded every day with a high yet sweet doxology. Then you had some experience of the quality, so to say, of God in your house? Truly; certainly He was my father's God. Have you left Him? Well, there are so many new ideas and seductions and temptations that I do not seem to have kept up with tender closeness with my old faith that I hoped once to do; there are so many men that have ideas and plans and prophecies and propositions that for the moment— May it only be for the moment, my friend! Let no man rob you of your God; let your definitions change, enlarge, expand, illuminate, as you please, but never leave these central and all-uniting thoughts which we express by the illimitable name which we cannot define—GOD. Beware of all men who ask you for merely verbal definitions, and cling to those men who value definitions of the innermost consciousness and the deeper experience for which no words can be found.

Has God revealed Himself to mankind under this name of Father? Yes, clearly in one case; I may say obviously in not a few cases. "Like as a father": a father multiplied by eternity or infinity. The only notion you can get of God at present is "like as a father." Religion is built on reason, built on nature, is sustained in all its popular representations by things with which the soul in its best moods is quite familiar. We need the word "like as"; it is a parable in itself is that expression "like as." Jesus Christ stooped to use it; in no other way could He penetrate our blindness or our stupidity. So He said, You want to know what the kingdom of heaven is: why it is like— We live in parables; true religion is ideal and symbolic. We often have occasion to use the words, "like unto" or "as if." God pardons our lame and imperfect illustrations. God might well smile upon our struggling endeavours to get at figures or metaphors that would give some faint hint at least of His infinity. Beware of many people who have what are called clear views of God and clear views of religion. As to views, as that term is narrowly used, have nothing to do with them; have a soul, a responsive

consciousness, an attention that cannot withdraw its eye or ear until the King has come. Oh, these poor miserable huts in which people dwell who have nothing to live upon but views, which change with the diagnosis of the weather and alter with the moods so to say of the air. Beware of priggishness in religion, beware of pedantry in spiritual things; oh, rest in the Lord! Throw thyself, my poor bruised soul, on the softness of the Divine pity, and rest there till another star comes, and another, and until the infinite azure burns with planetary splendour.

Can we get any idea of God from what are called the inferior animals? We are at liberty to speak disrespectfully of them because they do not talk our mother tongue and cannot answer us with a just *tu quoque*. There is a passage which gives a good answer to this inquiry: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest"—pulls the year-old house to pieces that the eaglets may go out and make a living for themselves. There is room enough in the air, and the eagle stirs up the eaglets and little by little prepares them for flight; sometimes she takes them on her great pinions and flies with them, and then drops away from them, and leaves them to do what they can in the kind summer air. So God sometimes takes up our houses, our nests, in order that He may teach us to fly to Himself, or in order that we may move our wings and feel sure that we could not have had wings if God did not intend us to use them in flight. And so everywhere, in all the little things and all great things, in all metaphors and symbols, we are brought nearer and nearer to an appreciation or true conception of God. Yet always we must submit to our limitations. It is impossible for us to think of God other than as an infinite Man; and that is well-nigh impossible, for the word infinite is undefinable; yet we know it, and mean it and must have it.

In all these symbols and figures, personifications, and the rest, the personality of God is never disturbed; He is never other than personal, living, watching, sympathising. We can connect all these actions or emotions with personality—individuality.

We do not resolve God into an infinite vapour; He comes to our imagination as a glorious Man, and more multiplied by more, and the unit squared and cubed up into the inexpressible. In all these figures and illustrations there is a wonderful element of small providence. There is the housewifely element. God comes and makes our bed in our affliction; He comes with the morning light and evening shadow, as typical of rest and sweet dream. He is round about, He besets us behind and before, and lays His hand upon us; He whispers, saying, This is the way: walk in it, My son, and reach thy home in due time. In all these symbols the energy of God is depicted or hinted at, as keeping all things together: for that He is strong in power; not one faileth. So did the prophet speak of the stars, and so will we speak of souls and lives and loves. But we can come nearer to God still if we come to the Son of God, the Emmanuel, God with us, God manifest in the flesh, God with man. Why not? That is His own idea; it is given in the very first book in the Bible: So God made man in God's own image, in the image and likeness of God created He man—a double man, a man-woman, the duality that carries the seed of the race. We have not yet seen God, but we have seen Jesus; we have heard the Son of God, we know all His parables by heart. If all the parables were destroyed many Christian spirits could put them together again without missing a word. And we watched His looks, and we measured His tones, and we saw how He looked upon the self-righteous, and we knew by that look that our God is a consuming fire, as well as a gentle Shepherd. Let us study God in Christ. Do not ask impertinent questions or push an irreverent curiosity into flat blasphemy; stand at the right distance, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Do not deny the Invisible; rather deny your own eyesight, for it is a poor sight, a sight made up somehow of mere material substance that can be penetrated and analysed, hardly sight at all, and thine eye at its brightest and sharpest is but a dim hint of the eye that saw thee in all thy members before thou wast born. Rest in God; this film shall melt away, and I shall see and you shall see the

loved ones who now know what we cannot in this lower sphere yet know. And what if it should turn out at last that the whole creation is crowded with living, loving, watching spirits? I would rather believe that than believe that the world is in the hands of the devil. He who can believe that the world is in the hands of the devil may not have faith, but he has immense credulity. I believe in the Invisible. God is a Spirit.

[*Thursday Morning, 12th April, 1900.*]

Prayer.

HE was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. Blessed Spirit of the living God, reveal this mystery to our hearts as we are able to bear it, that we may draw away from our sin and be brought near to the side that was pierced for us and out of which came blood and water. We bless Thee for the mystery of love, we thank Thee that Thou hast not left us in the poverty-stricken condition of having no mystery to charm our minds and lead us away from the little and the contemptible into the infinite and the overwhelming. Pity those poor dogs of men who have no sky, no infinity, no immortality, who live in a vessel of their own building and sail on rivers whose narrow banks they can touch on either side. Deliver us from this prison of littleness, this gaol and dungeon of the contemptible and the measurable, and take us day by day where we may watch the unexplained atonement and tremble before the awful sacrifice. There is a fountain filled with blood ; it was filled with blood that we might have our sins cleansed and taken away. Oh, spare us, lest we come into contact with people who have no God, no soul, no mystery, nothing that is unspeakable and full of glory ; keep us clear of them, lest our souls go down by their coldness and sordid worldliness. Teach us to find our wings, and teach us the use of those great pinions that we may find the gate of the morning and worship in the temple of light. God pity us ! for the sinner and the vile men are close at hand. Amen.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

"And sitting down they watched Him there."—MATT. xxvii. 36.



O what special place is reference made? In the thirty-third verse we read, "And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they . . . crucified Him and parted His garments." Whilst this was all going on it is said of the people, "And sitting down they watched Him there." What was there to watch? There had been many crucifixions; Golgotha was a well-known place in the district; what is it that to-day lifts it up out of the commonplace and lifts it on a higher level where the sun can get at it and the darkness too? How suddenly in life the commonplace becomes the marvellous; how quite unexpectedly some poor unknown shrub, unnamed by botany, burns into a living temple of the living God! How mysteriously and quite out of the common courses of thought does daily bread which a mother might have for her children become the body of Christ, the flesh of the Son of God, and through that wondrous supper-feast Christ, so to say, gives back the flesh which earth lent Him for a moment. That is the great title for the true life of Christ whenever it can be written without anecdotes and small inventions of what is imaginatively called the imagination—"The Days of His Flesh"; the few days in which He wore the coat, the few days in which He was seen and touched and in divers ways felt and handled; it is spoken of almost as if it were a robe, and having had it in hand for a little while He takes it off and says, Eat it, and live. What is this particular Cross? This is no novelty; the same Cross would have been thrown together by the cruel hammers of the Romans for a murderer; this was no cedar-wood picked of Lebanon on purpose, as who should say,

He must die very grandly, He shall die with cedar odour in His nostrils, it may mitigate the misery of death. It was not so, the miraculous or marvellous was not in the wood; this was no dainty arrangement of artistic hands; on the same Cross the Jews or Romans would have crucified a dog; why, then, be so fascinated by this Cross? There are three more crosses yonder, and far more crosses further on, and there have been a hundred crosses round about this spot within the last number of years. But somehow there stands up to-day a Cross that is *The* Cross, that puts all the other crosses away or gathers them up into its own heart as if they had but dimly and unintentionally symbolised a Cross that was coming. We never know what we are doing; we do not realise that we shall find our words by-and-by set up in great deeds and noble symbols, and they shall be turned into gracious inspirations and balm-like solaces and comforts to the soul when it is wounded and sore distressed. Why should so much attention, let us ask again and again, be bestowed upon this Cross? I look at the cross to the right of it, it seems to be of the same material; to the cross at the left of it, I do not see any difference between the outside crosses and the central Cross: why, then, should the central Cross be *the* Cross and be painted by every man that aspires to the sublimity of his art, and find its way into every song that has tones to subdue and ennoble the nations? They watched Him there, they watched nowhere else, they saw no one else; there was in reality to their religious imagination and their sensitive hearts but one Man, one Cross, one event, and a strange process of focalisation went on that day, until the whole universe seemed to converge in all its planetary threads upon the Cross and be knotted there into a new and perfect significance.

Does Christ die for Himself? Other men have died for themselves or on account of their particular crimes: does Christ die for Himself? They say that no evil was found in His mouth; when He was reviled He reviled not again, when He suffered He threatened not, but He stood before those who were hard upon Him as a lamb might stand before her

shearers or a sheep be dumb under the steel. He cannot be dying for Himself. Some things apparently true cannot be true. We are a long way from realising that great fact ; we do not know in reality as part and parcel of the very tissue of the soul, if I may so say it, that some things cannot be true. We have not learned that elementary fact or philosophy even in our common life. We still take offence—poor, dear fools, necessary to the completeness of the statistics of the world ! We sometimes still take offence at our friends, and we fume and whine about it, not knowing all the circumstances, but still think we are exercising a great hereditary right when we are offended with those who have in a thousand instances proved their friendship and their love. So we leap on from one little spot to another, so we traverse the green wall like so many poor frogs leaping a little and getting on so, and in the meantime much wounded because a friend has done something which we cannot understand and which therefore must be wrong. Yet we, so foolish, want to understand the Atonement, and have undertaken to lecture upon God ! Who can measure us and fit us with a garment of folly fit for the narrowness of our stupidity ? We should believe in the friendship within the friendship, and which cannot be disloyal, and we should believe therefore that anything external and transient will presently be explained ; it is only on the surface, and the person supposed to be guilty of the offence does not know that he has offended anybody. By-and-by people will see how extremely unjust and foolish they have been, but they should have started there. You should have a city of the mind, you should know love, and that love cannot offend, and that what looks like offence is only a momentary eclipse to be accounted for and to be added to the after-brightness of the suspected glory. Jesus Christ therefore, in my esteem, did not die for Himself. There is a beautiful explanation of His death, and when I get a beautiful explanation why should I go round and round seeking for an insufficient and untenable explanation ? Why be wicked in the devil's courts ? Why be an expert in the school of Satan ? When God has put before me the beautiful spring flowers—oh, so beautiful and so wishful to

be appreciated as His gifts—why should I advertise in this or that journal as to what wax florist made these primroses and trimmed these white violets? What is the beautiful explanation of this death of Christ? “Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sickness” (Matt. viii. 17). That is enough. What did He strip us of? He stripped us of our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses; He said in effect, Give me these, I want them all, I have come to do this. I proceeded forth and came from God that I might strip you of all these devil garments, and I will wear them in your stead, and go in My priestly office before God and get rid of them for your sake, and you shall be clothed with the ineffable holiness; give Me your infirmity, I will take your sickness, I will extract the poison from your blood, and put it into My own, into channels that have been prepared for Me for a moment, and through these channels I will get rid of all your sins, infirmities, and sicknesses. Then said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me that Thou hast given me a body in which I might absorb all other body, flesh, and infirmity, and kill it, get rid of it, and cut the throat of the enemy, and spill his poison-blood upon the earth that sickens at its sight.

This mystery is not to be explained. The Atonement is not a riddle of which a person here and there may have the answer. Where we have strayed so far from simplicity and spiritual rest and confidence with all its life of hope is that we have made conundrums where God made none; we have turned the Deity into an enigma, we have not only turned Calvary into an excursion and a place to halt at, but we have turned the blood, red, reeking hot, into a conundrum to lecture upon. Oh that some great mysteries might be left to the heart; oh that we knew with all the knowledge of the soul that some things can only be seen when all the lights are put out. But man is fond of conundrums; he says that the great problem of the Atonement was explained with great lucidity and piercing insight. Rather let me hear the oath of profanity than hear such blasphemous language. We can only see the Atonement, if we ever see it, once—a flash—gone! But

we remember the brightness of that white light for ever.

Let us hear what Jesus would say about His own sorrow. His voice is very low, but being low it is very high—a vocal contradiction; it seems to bring part of Himself with it, and yet to have such power of penetration as to fill all the winds that roar all round the world with strange weird music. Oh, Thou Son of God, why that countenance of grief? Why did they say of Thee that Thou art a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? What is it that mars Thy face with inward agony? Let us read in this same Matt. xxvi., “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (verse 38). It is His “soul” that is sorrowful. The thief that is to be executed to-morrow is apprehensive of the agony of the body, the pain of the flesh; but this Man, the Christ, foreseeing and fore-feeling the Cross in its spiritual meaning, says, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” Why, if He did not tell us it may be vain prying on our part to endeavour to find out; but this sorrow has something moral in it, something spiritual; this is a new agony; there has been pain in the world from the dumb beast upward, but here is a new pain, a pain that gets hold of a new part of manhood and works unutterable misery in a place hitherto not open, at least in the same way, to the ministry of pure agony. This neuralgia of the soul is not to be treated by any of our medicaments; nothing that is found in the rocks can heal it, nothing that grows among the herbs of the field can mitigate the heat of this neuralgia; it has taken hold of the nerves of the soul, and here is a new misery. That is why it makes me horribly resentful when I hear men through trumpets and musical strings imitating the agony of my Lord. Even Handel had been better employed than to have mimicked the grief of Gethsemane. The music as music is superb, passing all proper intellectual appreciation, and setting up the musician himself on a pedestal difficult to overthrow; but when I hear men and women mimicking the grief of the Christ I would rather they chose some other subject for the exercise of their superlative abilities. When I hear them sing, “Comfort ye,

comfort ye My people, saith your God," I am thrilled with delight: only, keep away from Gethsemane and from Calvary; sing some other theme, or if you sing that theme, let it be in the simplest strains, let there be no attempt to mimic Him when He was described as a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Ober-Ammergau in its first meaning was simple and beautiful, and among yonder hills it might all have been done with the pardon of heaven; but to commercialise it and make money out of it and turn it into a great exhibition, this it is that hurts me, for I would in my poor way protect my Lord from the insult of such compliments.

With all His power could He not tear the Cross to pieces or come down from it and look death into the eyes of His murderers? Yes, He could have done all that; it would not have been worthy of Him; that policy would not have had in it the mystery of His own death. This is not a murder, it is a sacrifice; this is not manslaughter, it is atonement. From the very first would it not seem that there was a tragedy in this speechless babe of the stable and the manger? Yes: "Behold," said one, speaking of the Christ, "this child is set for . . . a sign which shall be spoken against." We know what this means in a poor dim way about certain human lives. They were born to be hated. There have been some men who have had to fight their way through sneering devils and through serried ranks of cruel men. As children they had to play alone and to be misunderstood, or if not to be misunderstood, to be explained, which is still worse; they were mocked on the street, laughed at in society, pointed out as matter for derision, and not until they were nearly ripe for the grave did men begin to see the meaning of the mystery, the explanation of the grief. Of Jesus Christ it is said, "He was set to be spoken against": He was always in the way; there was no room for Him in the inn, there is no room for Him in any really well-furnished house; He does not live amongst furniture, He would be a contradiction to the silken sofa; there is too much of Him to be mahoganied and upholstered and decorated with trees which His own hands have made and set up on the hillsides. So He must work His

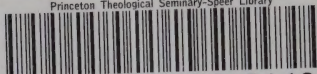
way through all manner of offences, misinterpretations, and misunderstandings, until at last some poor stranger, some Roman centurion, shall say amid the gathering environment of the new position, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

And what did the Apostles say about this Cross and this whole mystery? Paul will be the first to speak, though not the first chronologically—"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. iii. 13). This is the man who understands more about this mystery than any other man then or since has understood. Some men have a kind of *entrée* into the tabernacles of the mysterious and the invisible. Account for it as we may, some people see further than do others; and some people have died for their foresight, and then they were canonised as prophets. In their own day and in their own surroundings they were lunatics; but since other centuries have come with their silent interpretations, with their revealing lights, they have been elevated into prophets. So Paul said, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law." The law was rigorous, inexorable; the law has no tears, the law knows nothing about pity; it never gets beyond the statutes and decrees and fixed penalties. The law cannot hesitate, much less break down in pitying tears; the law says, You must pay or be crushed to death. The law cannot adopt any other language; law cannot be partly sentimental, it must be a demand followed by a sword. What the law could not do, in that it was weak, God did by sending His Son. The Son was above the law, the Son that brought grace—a new word—a new thing in the policy and providence and redemption of life. So there was one day a great separation. The law came by Moses, and he looks like it; grace and truth came by Jesus and He looks like it, for His face is sculptured love.

Would that we could understand this word Grace! It has a soft music of its own, even in the matter of pronunciation. No wonder the poet sang, "Grace, 'tis a charming sound." Not when taken out of the dictionary, where it has no right to be, but taken straight out of the lips of God and taken right into the heart, then it is a soundless sound that is not

musical but music—between which there may be the distance of infinity. We might add Peter's keen, large, true word in 1 Peter iv. 1—"Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh." On that we will not now enlarge; but Jesus Christ must, on that Cross of His, be delivered from a misinterpretation. Christ was not a mere example, that Cross was never needed to be set up to explain to me the meaning of the word example. He was an example, but not in His dying, not in His propitiatory act; He was an example, but on the Cross, and all that belongs to the Cross, He is the power of God unto salvation, the atonement, the mystery that makes discords harmonious. The one thing the world did not need was an example. Examples horrify men, examples may discourage men, examples may excite the resentment of men. They may say, Why did not God make me as good as that man was to start with? If He had made me like that man, of the same quality, there need have been no incarnation, there need not have been any evangelical theology. Why did not God start me as He started that man? It is not an example we need, we have had examples sufficient; why, we have not been able to follow even human examples: how far short we have fallen of our father's example at home or our sweet mother's example, on whose face no man ever saw a look that was not holy, and out of whose mouth there never came a breath tainted with the devil's wickedness. We have had examples enough in our pastors and friends and best companions. We want more than an example; we want somebody to take off the leprous robe and give us newness of life. And that Some One must not be one of ourselves, cannot be one of ourselves, must be God, God with us, Emmanuel, the incarnate Spirit. It must be God that dies. And we must not regard Jesus Christ as a mere sufferer. All the pictures that have been verbally painted upon this subject are unworthy of the occasion: how He moans, how He sighs, sobs, groans, and cries out for very sorrow of heart. The thieves who were crucified made no such ado about the Cross; these embruted men despised the Roman and his gallows; but my Jesus trembles, says He is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Why is He less heroic than

the thieves? See how the subject is degraded by talking about His merely bodily suffering. It was sorrow of the soul, it was sorrow that He endured that we might get rid of sin and enter into the mystery of fellowship with God. Now you lift the subject to its right level, now you see why He came into the world. It was to save sinners.



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